

# On the Worst Day of Our Life, God Is Still There

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**By Debbie Aylsworth**

LAMESA, Texas—The love story of Quinton and Pam Kearney began on tractors.

“Our dads shared a turn row,” Pam said. “They both farmed side by side and we both worked on tractors during the summer and mine broke down so I went to flag a tractor down. The first one turned around and the second one was him” (Quinton).

Pam’s knight on a white horse turned out to be Quinton on a tractor. They were both 17, and they married after they turned 19. The same man led both of them to the Lord: Pam when she was 13 and Quinton when he was 18. Their faith is the cornerstone of their marriage.

Their trust in God is an encouragement to all who know them, and, when they faced the worst time of their lives, their faith has been an amazing testimony of the love of God.

Quinton and Pam Kearney have been married 26 years. They had two children. Sarah is in her senior year at Sul Ross State University. Colton was a sophomore at Klondike High School when tragedy struck.

Quinton and Pam want people to know that, on the worst day of their lives, God is good. God is in control and you can trust Him.

The worst day was when Colton died.

## **Breakfast, then heartbreak**

On Dec. 11, 2019, 16-year-old Colton Kearney had a breakfast of bacon and eggs with his mom and dad.

“We had been having breakfast together for a long time. I would get up and I cooked him bacon and eggs every morning,” Quinton said. “As he got older, he was harder to get out of bed and he would just comb his hair, grab a pop tart and head out the door.

“The night before, Colton said, ‘You know what? I miss us having bacon and eggs together.’

"I said, 'Well you have to get up.'

"He said, 'I will. Wake me up as soon as you get up and we can have breakfast together.'

"So, sure enough, I woke him up and he sat down and we got to eat. That was a good thing."

Colton left for school.

"Every day we would walk him to the door, then pray for him from our front window until we couldn't see him anymore," Pam said. "That morning, we walked him to the door, hugged him, said good-bye and told him we loved him. That's the last thing we said to him."

Quinton said, "It wasn't foggy when he left, but, as Pam and I were sitting there drinking our coffee, we looked up and we couldn't even see the fence in the backyard. It just kinda rolled in. We were sitting here, kinda nervous, but when it got to be 8:30 we knew he would be at school and I relaxed."

Quinton began the story of what happened next.

"The phone rang. It was Steven Archer, a friend of mine, and it was not usual for him to call me. I didn't answer right away because we were busy and I thought I would call him back in a few minutes. It rang again. I thought: He's [Colton is] in trouble.

"I knew something was wrong. He [Steven] asked me if I was home. Pam asked me what was wrong. I was so upset I couldn't catch my breath. I said, 'I don't know, I don't know, but it's not good.' That's all I could say."

A few minutes later, Archer arrived at their door, along with Sheriff Matt Hogg and then-Chief Deputy Josh Peterson.

"I talked to them just a second and they told me what happened," Quinton said. "We learned Colton missed the curve on the road around Friendship Baptist Church, and he overcorrected and skidded sideways. He was hit by an 18-wheeler and was killed instantly."

Looking at Pam, Quinton said, "You came in. You had heard it."

His voice trailed off and Pam picked up, "No, I didn't. I came in and I knew somebody had died. I knew it was one of my kids, I just didn't know which one."

She quickly learned.

Quinton said, "We just hit the floor and we stayed there for what felt like hours. Time stood still, we were just lying there, bawling. We couldn't breathe, couldn't think. People started coming in. I don't know how they got in the house and we just laid there."

Pam said, "I remember being on the floor and just turning and looking at Steven, giving him the dirtiest look and saying. 'I don't believe you.' "

"That night or the next night, I had this dream. We were laying there in the floor reliving it all again—and I was giving Steven the dirty looks, saying, 'I don't believe you.' Colton was standing right there and he kept saying, 'Mama, it's true.' "

With a broken voice Quinton said, "It's still pretty raw."

### **Angels of support**

Pam picked up, "Suddenly there were people here, like Quinton says. They had called our pastor from the scene. I remember turning around and there he was. It felt as if he was this huge, enormous presence and he just grabbed us and it was the safest place to be. We got his shirt wet with our tears and he held us and we cried and he cried. His wife was here and our youth pastor and his wife were here. I don't know how long we stayed there either. The whole house was beginning to be filled with people."

"I bet there were at least 30 people in our house most of the time for six days," Quinton said. "We couldn't have made it without them. It was the Holy Spirit. You could feel it thick in here."

"If you even looked like you were thirsty, someone put a drink in your hand. Our friends—we called them the angels—they were just moving around, keeping a list of what food people brought and keeping up with all that stuff the whole time and keeping us going."

Those "angels" simply stepped in and took care of the couple.

"We would be talking to this person, talking to that person and they would put their arm around us and say, 'Y'all need to go here or there and we're gonna drive you' and we would go. 'You need to go to the funeral home.' We'd get in a car and then they would bring us back. 'Are y'all hungry?' "

Pam said: "Our family was so good. I don't think they slept much the first few days because they were taking care of us, even while experiencing their own grief. We couldn't answer a question. They would ask me what I wanted to eat and I would say, 'I don't know, I don't know,' and they would ask if I wanted them to make my bed and I would say, 'I don't know.' What do you want to wear? 'I don't know.' Even now, if I get real upset about it, I think I don't know what to do, I don't know what to do. You're just stuck with this tangle of emotion."

Quinton said, "The day of the accident I had to function for a while because they told me I had to talk to troopers. They had to ask questions about him as they were investigating what happened and I had to be on point. After we laid in the floor a couple of hours, it was immediately back to business."

"We got split up," Pam said. "Suddenly it was 10 at night, it was the end of the day, and I would finally see him" (Quinton). "I didn't realize he had to talk to state troopers. I felt terrible he had to go through all that by himself."

Quinton quickly said: "But my friends were right there with me with their hands on my shoulders. They were there with me constantly, talking to me with their arm around me. The officers would ask me a question and I would think, Is this supposed to be this hard?"

"Then I would feel one of them squeeze my shoulder. 'Yep, it is.' "

### **The accident**

They found Colton's phone at the scene, but he wasn't using it at the time of the accident.

"We don't ever have to worry about that," Pam said. "They had to be sure he wasn't using his phone."

The tire tracks showed Colton went off the pavement on the straight part of the road leading up to the curve, then overcompensated on the curve. They believe he was out of control for maybe four to six seconds and then immediately with Jesus.

"God knows our time on earth to the very second," Pam said. "The first responders, sheriffs, troopers and volunteers—we knew most of them. Our kids are friends and we are friends with them. I have known Matt Hogg since kindergarten. Quinton's good friend and fellow school-board member [Steven Archer], also a volunteer fire fighter, was the one who actually spoke the words to us. He's the one I argued with saying I didn't believe him."

### **Reaching his sister**

What about Sarah, who was in the town of Alpine?

"That was just awful," Pam said. "We lost so much time, but people were finding out. There was an hour between the time of the accident and the time we found out. We didn't get her told for probably another hour."

Quinton said: "I called her boss at the taxidermy place where she [Sarah] worked. He [the boss] was kinda like a father figure to her. I told him—well the sheriff called them and told him what happened. I called him and he already knew what happened. I told him to find her and tell her to call me and I'd tell her. He stayed there with her at her house until we got people down there to pick her up."

### **The funeral**

Quinton said, "It was six days. We had three family birthdays we had to dodge before we could have the funeral. There was an autopsy and several things that had to finish first."

"I was so proud of Quinton," Pam said. "When the pastor and youth minister came back two days after the accident to plan the funeral, Quinton met them at the door and said, 'We're gonna need an invitation at the funeral. We want to make sure people have a chance to accept the Lord.' "

They all went to their bedroom for some privacy to plan the funeral.

"I remember telling them, 'My pet peeve is when people say God is good all the time. All the time, God is good,' and they only say it when something good just happened," Pam said.

"We are declaring, on the worst day of our life, 'God is still good,' and that is the message we want preached at this funeral. Nothing is going to change the goodness of God. No matter what is going on in your life, God is still good."

It was a huge funeral at First Baptist Church. About 1,300 people were there. "The sanctuary was full," Pam said. "The chapel was full, and people were standing all around too."

"A lot of people watched it online," Pam said. "It was a beautiful funeral."

A story told about Colton at the funeral was his use of comments that were above his age. It was a message that would comfort Pam and Quinton later.

Colton was smart. In his sophomore year of high school he took the ACT college entrance exam and scored a 32 out of a possible 36. He won a gold medal in state UIL [University Interscholarstic League] math competition. One day he was talking about a story discussed in Sunday school and he identified the situation as "Object Permanence."

Pam said that when the adults who were present asked for clarification, Colton said, "It's like when you are playing peekaboo with a baby and you cover your eyes. They really think you're gone and then you pull your hands away from your face and you say, 'Here I am!' Sometimes we're all just like big ol' dumb babies. Sometimes we think just because we can't see God that He's not there. But God is always there whether we can see Him or not."

Pam smiled and continued: "That is one of those profound things that God let come out of his [Colton's] mouth three days before his accident. That has been such a comfort to us. God is there whether you can see Him or not."

Pam recalled that people came to hug them at the visitation for about two hours. Then, at the end of the funeral, there was more hugging with friends for a couple of hours.

"I'll keep hugging them as long as they come to see me," Pam said. "They are grieving too! They said, 'We love you and we are praying for you.' "

Despite their grief, the Kearneys they felt the grief of others and had compassion for them. They felt the depths of pain only a mother and father can know, but they weren't covered with it so entirely that they couldn't see and reach out to their friends and family."

The couple said they are forever grateful to all of the first responders for all they did that day.

"We pray for the truck driver," Pam said. "We don't blame him one bit. It was a tragic accident and we want to release him of that. We don't want him to carry this the rest of his life."

## **Planting seeds**

Colton had developed a strong interest in planting seeds, growing things and getting them to harvest.

He received a greenhouse for Christmas when he was 14. The videos from that day and the pictures of Colton's excitement with overflowing thankfulness and love for his parents were unmistakable.

Colton would hear the name of a plant and he would remember and would also learn and retain the Latin name. Planting seeds and growing plants earned Colton the title of Plant Man.

"I don't think it was a coincidence that God made him the Plant Man," Pam said. "Through all this, so many seeds have been planted in people's lives, and we are getting to watch some things grow and some things we'll never get to see. I think that has been part of God's plan all along to give us some comfort, too—about the planting and the seeds."

Pam and Quinton state today that many good, eternal things have been planted in people's lives because of Colton's life and death.

"It was neat how Colton loved the plants. He was constantly picking up leaves anytime we were in a greenhouse. He would bring them home and propagate them," Pam said.

In the backyard greenhouse of their country home, Colton's gardening gloves remain where they were on the greenhouse work table at the time of his death. His cap still hangs on a nail inside the greenhouse.

### **Spreading the seeds**

As God used Colton's life and accident, He is using Pam and Quinton's lives today to plant seeds in people's lives.

"God was working behind the scenes helping us learn to say 'God is good' on the worst day of our lives," Pam said.

Quinton and Pam have clung to Romans 8:28 in the Bible, which says, "But we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

It helps their grieving hearts to hear stories of the good that God has provided and the work He is continuing to do through Colton's death.

"We've heard of people being saved, marriages and families being reconciled, parents committing to being better parents and people taking eternity seriously," Pam said.

"Looking back over Colton's life, we see God was doing big things, working behind the scenes," Pam said with a big smile.

"He's doing things we don't know. He has a bigger plan for us. Colton often said very profound things, profound enough that we never forgot them. Now his words are ministering to us. We know God had that come out of his mouth so we would remember that now and be comforted.

"God is good. God is in control. God loves us, and we can trust Him."