

HEALING THROUGH HOPE

Ian's Place for Bereaved Parents provides a safe, supportive space for grieving parents

BY VALERIE HARDY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAURA DUFFY

Aug. 1, 2019 was a dividing line in Andy and Rebecca Wells' life. Before that, for the Oak Brook couple - who first met while in preschool in Downers Grove - "life was awesome," Rebecca said.

After challenges starting a family early in their marriage, Andy and Rebecca turned to in vitro fertilization and had three children: Jack, Ian, and Georgia. Rebecca was enjoying her last few years as a stay-at-home mom (Jack and Ian were on summer break from college and Georgia from high school), when she and Andy received a call that would change everything. They were informed that Ian, whose summer job involved unloading freight trains, had been involved in a fatal worksite accident.

That call, a parent's worst nightmare, marked the "after" for the Wells family. Deep in grief, Andy and Rebecca were searching for comfort. Andy went to see a Christian counselor who he said was "a good guy, but he didn't know." He had not lost a child.

Rebecca attended general grief and support groups but could not find what she needed: connection with other bereaved parents. "I wanted to meet with anyone who had lost a child and through all the grief and pain could still find joy. I finally started connecting, and I felt less numb, less alone," she said.

Through the community they built with other grieving parents coupled with the comfort they found in their faith, Andy and Rebecca began their journey toward healing and renewed hope, and they were moved to help other bereaved parents do the same. So they created Ian's Place for

Remodeling] who donated a lot of time, labor, and materials," Andy said, they renovated the building to create a warm and welcoming space for bereaved parents to participate in grief groups as well as Bible studies aimed toward helping grieving parents heal.



IAN'S PLACE FOR BEREAVED PARENTS STEERING COMMITTEE.

Bereaved Parents in their late son's honor, a place to help both newly bereaved parents and parents who have been grieving the loss of a child for years find "healing through hope for the future," Rebecca explained.

Andy and Rebecca - together with a steering committee comprised of seven other parents who had experienced the loss of a child along with two other compassionate friends - strive to bring bereaved parents together to make the devastating loss of a child less lonely. The couple purchased the former locksmith building along the train line in Clarendon Hills, and, with the help of "a whole lot of people from my work [Normandy

While - as the organization's mission statement notes - Ian's Place "exists to help bereaved parents find a place for comfort and healing in a Christian environment," all are welcome. "We don't disqualify anyone who comes in and isn't a strong Christian," Andy said, "but that's where we found our hope."

Opened in October, Ian's Place provides individual outreach to bereaved parents in addition to grief groups and weekly Bible studies. Steering committee member Sandy Lagestee explained

that Rebecca sends grieving parents a card, blanket, and book (entitled "A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss" by Jerry Sittser) that brought Andy and her a lot of peace. And when they are ready - whether a month after their loss or a year - Rebecca meets with each grieving parent who reaches out and lets them know they are not alone. "While there is no playbook for grieving," Andy said, Ian's Place is here as a "community to love you, to help you through this, and to help you realize there can be joy again at some point in your life."

Visit iansplace.org for more information. ■