

*For the Readers of Possible Fatal Who Remember Joanie's Daughter, Protector, Caretaker and Confidant*



When Cameron was born in February 1967, the attending pediatrician, observing Cam's activity level, prophesied (accurately) that Joanie would have her hands full. Cam rolled over on her third day of life and walked at 6 or 8 months. At one year, when a typical baby would stand while holding onto the furniture, Cameron was riding a two-wheeler! That energy and free spirit were successfully channeled into swimming. By the age of six Cameron was winning ribbons and medals in swimming. Although she was not eligible, in 1979 her coach managed to get Cam a chance to compete in the national pre-Olympic try-outs in Long Beach. At the age of twelve she beat all of the older hopefuls and established herself as the California champion in the backstroke. She was destined for the 1984 Olympic, but it wasn't to be.

*Cameron Thurston  
1967 - 2006*

A "gang rape" changed all of that. She may have seen herself as damaged, ruined or "unclean." In any event, her perception of herself must have been very painful. She gravitated to alcohol and drugs to kill the emotional pain. During Cam's teen years, drug treatment programs absorbed several hundred thousands of dollars and accomplished nothing—except to convince Joanie that she was to blame for her daughter's addiction.

Adolescence can be a synonym for "conflict." It was that for Joanie and Cam. On one occasion Cameron drove her mother over the edge. Joanie threw her down and pinned her to the floor while screaming, "What the hell do you want from me?" The episode ended when Joanie realized that her husband was standing over her with the poker from the fireplace.

At the time of her accident and NDE in 1997, Joanie and Cameron were sharing an apartment in Portland. The medical personnel had decided to send Joanie to rehabilitation. Cam intervened vigorously, insisting that Joanie was coming home with her to their upstairs apartment where Cam would care for her. She did not flinch upon seeing Joanie's ugly wounds. She cleaned her open wounds for nearly a year. Every day she set out what was needed for Joanie to care for herself. She reported to the visiting nurse as if she had had professional medical training. She had no such training; She was an exotic dancer.

Cam hated what she had to do in order to buy the drugs she needed to kill the pain of being an exotic dancer. Her friends and lifestyle were quite toxic for Joanie. In 1999 Joanie rented her own apartment in the same complex. After her NDE Joanie was changed in many ways. One change pleased Cameron very much. She bragged that her mom was the most nonjudgmental person she knew. Their relationship improved considerably.

When she was drunk or on drugs, Cameron genuinely hated her mother and let her know it. She had always believed that her addiction was due to the "fact" that her mother had put her on drugs (Ritalin) as a child. In later summer of 2006 she learned the truth—her mother had never given her drugs. After checking to be certain, Cameron accepted responsibility for her addiction and told her mother that she was going to put herself in treatment for drug and alcohol addiction. Joanie had been hoping and praying for this for more than 25 years. The announcement brought a flood of tears; it was the high point in Joanie's life.

Cameron completed the treatment and maintained sobriety for about ten days. They had some great talks during that time. Then Joanie sensed that Cam was back on drugs. Her disappointment devastated Joanie. They had words. Their last phone conversation ended with Cam saying, "Mom I won't be talking to you for a while."

Cam's boyfriend knew that she was alive on Wednesday, October 25. By Saturday the 28th both Joanie and the

boyfriend had to know. We all went to her apartment and found four newspapers in front of the door. We called 911, the police came; the apartment manager opened the door. The heat and the smell of death rushed out at us. Cam had just showered and the heat was turned up high. Pills were scattered around and some furniture had been knocked over.

Cam had collapsed a few times at work in recent weeks. Her internal organs were failing. It must have been very painful. The medical examiner reported massive internal bleeding, which would confirm organ failure. The toxicology report confirmed the presence of drugs. There was no note, as there had been on all of the previous threats of suicide. There were no phone calls begging Joanie to care for the cats. Cam had plans for Halloween. This was not a planned suicide.

Cameron's body was cremated. Joanie had nearly died of dehydration and malnutrition two years earlier and at that time had pre-planned her own cremation and arranged for her ashes to be sent to the Proctor Mausoleum in Proctor Vermont next to the ashes of her mother and grandmother, Meme. Now Cameron's ashes are there, but there is also a space for Joanie's.

Cam had mentioned that she expected to die young---before the age of 40. (She lived 39 years, eight months and one week, 99.89% of 40 years.) She seemed to "know" at some deeper level that her life would be short. My understanding of "pre-birth planning" leads me to believe that Cameron lived out her life just as it had been planned.

I learned to admire Cam very much as I discovered her life while helping Joanie write Possible Fatal. The insight, intelligence and courage which she demonstrated, particularly while protecting her mother, created in me a deep respect. That role of protector of her mother started very early, at age four. While on a visit, Joanie's intoxicated mother-in-law verbally attacked Joanie with a laundry list of all of Joanie's shortcomings. Cameron grabbed her mother by the hand and started toward the door, only to be blocked by the mother-in-law who had not yet finished her list. Cameron kicked her in the shin, looked up at her and shouted, "F--- you, grandma!" and out the door they went.

When I think of the message Joanie received on the other side, I must count Cam's life as a success. "It's not the things you have done, it is the person you have become." Cameron became a person who faced reality and accepted responsibility for her life. She took action to make the necessary corrections until her body failed her. It doesn't matter how *long* she was a responsible human being. What matters is that she succeeded in *becoming* a mature, responsible adult.

A few months ago while I was reading Lynne McTaggart's *The Field* to Joanie, Cam's voice came into Joanie's right ear. "Tell Wally 'Hi' for me." It's been a while but I think they are talking again. And, the hall light above all of Cam's swimming medals and ribbons has been blinking recently. Cam also shows up in Joanie's sleep-time job helping her guide lost souls to the Light.

Ten days of loving communication seems so miniscule after a lifetime of conflict. And, the absence of face-to-face contact leaves a painful empty spot. The pain and emptiness is often most intense on the anniversary of the trauma. So it is with Joanie. Her last face-to-face contact with her own mother was on Joanie's 24th birthday, the day her mother ended her life. Joanie's last face-to-face contact with Cameron was also on Joanie's birthday, her 62nd. Later that week Joanie's protector, confidant, dear friend and daughter was found dead in her apartment.

*Wally Johnston*