

17FO

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Magazine

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North Texas and Southern Oklahoma



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17FO Magazine
The Perfect Combo!**

LESS TEARS, MORE YEARS

At five minutes until 8 o'clock on May 15th, 2007, Shelby said "Bye Daddy, I Love You." Five minutes later she could never say that again.



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To Your Health

Do You Know Your EF Number? The medical specialists at Wilson N. Jones Hospital explain what it is and why it is so important.

Remember When

Close Your Eyes And Go Back In Time... 'Eeny-Meeny-Miney-Mo' How many of these memories do you know?

What We Do

Aged To Perfection... Woodlawn Country Club has never been better!!

THINK PINK

By Rick Mason

Do you remember the last thing you said this morning to your kids? To your wife, husband, mother, father or any loved ones? Did you tell them you loved them? Why do we take those so dear to us for granted? The following interview will change that from this point on. Why is it so hard for some of us to say those three little words, I love you? It won't be after you take a journey with one family that does know just how thankful they are to have learned this from their precious princess, daughter Shelby Johnson. Some are not so lucky. So, if you have children and you can talk to them right now, you're one of the lucky ones. At five minutes till 8 o'clock in the morning on May 15th, 2007, Shelby Johnson said, "Bye Daddy, I love you." Five minutes later she could never say that again.

It has been only three months since Shelby was killed in a car accident in Pottsboro, Texas. I sat down with the entire family as they spoke about that day, Shelby's life and now her legacy. For those who have never lost a child you will never know what it feels like or what the family goes through. You can only imagine. Unfortunately, I know. The reason I am sitting at the Johnson's dining room table conducting this interview is because they now know also. Why talk about this so soon? It's been only three months. How can you do this? You will find out why and how. It's as simple as two little words... Shelby's words... Think Pink!

INFO: Sheila, tell me about your precious daughter Shelby.

SHEILA: I called Shelby my princess. We had a very, very close relationship. She was beautiful. She was my best friend. If she wasn't at school and I wasn't at work, we were together. My life has changed without her. She was outgoing at school and everybody says how friendly and funny she was. I remember her being with me when I was getting my drivers license renewed. I remember her counting up on her fingers and saying, "Mom, do you realize that in July 2007 you will have to get your license renewed and I will be driving by then." I got my license renewed the other day and remembered her saying that.

INFO: This story is hard very hard for you because Shelby lost her life on May 15th of this year and I also lost a child. When I hear you talking I hear you say, "was" often. Does it bother you to talk about her in the past tense?

SHEILA: Yes. It bothers me a lot. I catch myself saying things like, "Who's going to take the dog to get groomed." One day recently my sister and her family



Balloons released at Shelby's funeral.

were here and the comment was made that Bailey, our dog, needed to be groomed and I said, "Let Shelby take her because that will be an excuse for her to go somewhere, because she always wants to go somewhere." Then I caught myself and just started crying because it hurt me so bad to think that for just a moment I flipped.

INFO: How many children do you have?

SHEILA: Three. Ashleigh, Shelby & Ryan.

INFO: When people that don't know what happened to Shelby ask you how many children you have, how do you answer that question?

SHEILA: Three. I always say three.

INFO: I do too. I can't say anything else because I do have three kids. Do you feel like you have to follow that with an explanation?

SHEILA: No.

INFO: Shelby was sixteen years old. Can you tell me what happened May 15th?

SHEILA: We got up. It was just a normal day. We're just regular people that live in a regular house with a dog and a cat. We're just an All-American working family. Shelby always wanted a white Mustang. When she was in first grade she started telling her friends that when she grew up she would drive a white Mustang. She turned sixteen in February. We got the car about two weeks after she turned sixteen. We would practice driving in it everyday when I got home after work for two weeks after she got it before we let her drive it by herself. I finally let her drive it to school, but followed her the first two days. Then, I let her take it on her own and take her brother to school everyday. She had to call me when she got to school and call me when she got out of



school. I gave her permission to go to the Sonic. She called me when she got to Sonic. Then, when she left Sonic, she went to tan. She called me when she got to the tanning salon. She called me when she left there and then again when she got home. She would always say, "Mom, is this how it is going to be forever?" I said, "No, just for a little while until I get comfortable with you driving."

INFO: So, she understood why you had her call, but it bothered her?

SHEILA: Yes, she said her friends laughed at her. She knew she could not talk on the phone while she was driving, so she would call us before she got in the car. Even though, her friends still saw her calling her mom and thought it was funny. Anyway, Phil had been up late the night before helping Ryan, our son, with a science project. It was on a big piece of cardboard. I knew it would be difficult for Shelby to get it in the car if she took him to school. I had a hard time sleeping that morning and was up early. I walked into the living room and Ryan was ready for school, sitting on the couch with his project in his lap. I called up the stairs to Shelby and asked her if she was ready. She said she was still straightening her hair, so I told her I would take Ryan because his project would fit in my car easier. She stood up at the banister of the stairs and looked down at me. I asked her if she had any lunch money for school and told her I would put five dollars on the seat of her car. She said ok

and I told her I loved her and she said she loved me, and then Ryan and I left. I dropped him off at school and drove to work. As soon as I walked in the door at work, I got a phone call. That's when my whole life changed. I knew it wasn't that Shelby had just had a "fender bender." I don't remember driving back to Pottsville from Sherman, I just remember driving and beating on my steering wheel screaming, "No, God, No!"

INFO: Who called you?

SHEILA: Linda Morrison called me. I work with her. Linda said that her granddaughter, who goes to school with Shelby, heard that she had a wreck on

the way to school. I asked her if she would just drive down the road by our house and see if it was true. In the meantime, I called Phil and asked him to drive down there too because there was a rumor going around that Shelby had a wreck. I wanted to stay on the phone with him while he drove down there. Whenever he got to the end of the road he said, "Yes, there's a bunch of cars down here, Sheila." Then I heard him talking to Brett Arterburn, Chief of Police for the City of Pottsville. I kept screaming into the phone, "Phil, what's wrong? What's wrong?" He was still talking to Brett when the phone went off. I knew then that something bad had





happened or he would have continued to talk to me. I ran out of my office and got in my car and drove. When I got over the hill and saw everything, it was like a nightmare. There were cars everywhere. I pulled into the ditch; fell out of my car and just started beating the ground. Linda came over and tried to console me but I just kept digging into the dirt with my fingernails and screaming, “No, not my baby.” After that, I just remember so many people around me but really can’t recall what happened after that. I know other people from my work came and that Linda was there the whole time with me. I just sat there throwing grass and dirt all over her.

INFO: Phil, what did you see when you first drove up there?

PHIL: I was sitting in my office at home. I heard the hairdryer stop upstairs. Shelby came downstairs and told me, “Bye Daddy, I love you.” I said, “I love you too baby, be careful.” Then she walked out the door. She was always supposed to call me when she got to school. Enough time had passed for her to get to school and call me. I thought that maybe she just forgot to call me. I had gotten up and put on my shoes and was going to drive to town and just drive through the parking lot at school to make sure her car was there because I knew she couldn’t call me after she was

at school. Then I was going to go to the coffee shop and have a cup of coffee, then come back home and get back to work. While I was on the way out the door to get in my pick up, Sheila called. I was still in the driveway. I stayed on the phone with her as I drove down to the end of our road. When I topped the hill, I saw all the cars. I saw the wreck. There were bystanders and people helping. The wreck had shut down the highway, so people couldn’t pass in either direction. The police were directing traffic around and down our road. I saw the ambulance and fire trucks and the dump truck that Shelby had pulled out in front of. I saw Shelby’s car. I was still on the phone with Sheila as I got out of my truck. I just prayed that it wasn’t as bad as it looked. There was no doubt by the looks of her car that it was bad, but I was hoping somehow that it wasn’t the worst. Brett Arterburn, the Chief of Police and a very close friend of mine, walked up to me first. We immediately determined that it was Shelby. I don’t know if I hung the phone up when I was talking to Brett or if I just lost the connection, but I wanted to get Sheila back on the phone while someone else contacted her office to tell them not to let Sheila leave there. The State Trooper came up to me then and told me that Shelby had died in the accident. So that is when I tried to get Sheila back on the phone. She wasn’t answering her phone, so I called her office. They said she had





just ran out of the building. I told them what had happened. Then, I just kind of stood there not knowing what to do. I felt helpless. I was scared that Sheila was driving and might have a wreck too. I knew that I had several minutes before she got there and what I needed to do to prepare myself for this. I didn't know what to do. I had several people, friends of mine, come up to me. Several people from the school were there just minutes after I got there.

INFO: Did you see Sheila drive up?

PHIL: Yes. It was the most pitiful thing I have ever seen. She was hurting so bad. She was scared and wanted to go to where Shelby was.

INFO: They wouldn't let you though, right, Sheila?

SHEILA: No. They were holding me back. I never even saw her car. Everyone was just surrounding me. The news media was there and the police were telling me they needed to move me because the media was there and they didn't want them taking pictures of me on the ground.

INFO: At that time did you know how bad it was?

SHEILA: I knew she was dead.

PHIL: I told her. When I got there she pulled up as close as she could because there were so many cars there. I didn't see her when she initially got there, but when I did she was standing outside her car crying and screaming. I went over to

Poem written by one of Shelby's friends

Gone But Not Forgotten

It's sad to see such an innocent life go,
But reasons for why, we may never know.

Her time was up and she left us here,
To spread her love, with joy and cheer.
Her tragic accident will always be remembered,

As the day our hearts opened and surrendered.

Life is too short and we must move on,
Forgetting the pain, and embracing what's gone.

Her words to us, "THINK PINK" is true,

Cause one day soon we'll meet and say;
I've missed your smile and tender heart,
But now here in Eternity, we will never part.

I love you Shelby J.

I sit here and wait for that day,
That we meet in heaven and proudly pray.

The simple prayer to the whole world
That rings true to this special girl.

Love, Peace and Happiness.
Your heart and smile will be truly missed.

Love for all Eternity, and then
some.....Seth Torres

her and just held her. She wanted to go to Shelby and I just told her, "Shelby is gone, baby."

INFO: How did the accident happen?

PHIL: The only thing that we can determine is that Shelby just didn't see the truck. The sun was so bright and was directly in her eyes and just blinded her ability to see what was coming. It was about five minutes until 8 o'clock in the morning and she was turning east into the sun. She had pulled up and stopped at the stop sign. She just didn't see the truck. She pulled out in front of it. It was a dump truck. He was west bound. She pulled out across the westbound lane. The truck driver did not see her pull out. I have talked to witnesses that said they did see her come to a stop before she pulled out.

SHEILA: A lady that goes to church with us was coming from the other direction. She saw Shelby pull up there and even thought she was hesitating before she pulled out, so that's why we think the sun was blinding her. She pulled out just at the precise second that he hit her in the driver's door without ever applying any brakes or anything.

INFO: Have you talked with the driver of the truck since the accident?

PHIL: Oh yes. He's a friend of mine.

SHEILA: Shelby was friends with his daughter.

PHIL: They were cheerleaders together. Mark thought at first that he had hit his



own daughter because she drove a small, white car like Shelby's. They live right here on the same road we do. I have talked to him many times since then. It has just been devastating to him as well. When it happened Mark was just trying to climb in under the car and help whoever it was. He didn't know at first that it was Shelby. Mark and I have known each other for a number of years and have worked together on projects in town.

1770: This happened May 15th. When did Shelby get her driver's license?

SHEILA: She turned sixteen on February 2nd. It was about two weeks after that. Her sister took her to get it.

1770: Are you angry?

SHEILA: I've gone through different phases. I get angry.

PHIL: Yes, but who can I be angry at? What can I be angry at? I don't know. Am I angry with Shelby? No. I have a lot of anxiety and pent-up emotion. At times I just want to break something. Then I would just have to clean up a mess and what good is it going to do?

1770: You have two other children, is that right?

SHEILA: My son Ryan is 11 and my daughter Ashleigh is 24.

(Ashleigh and her boyfriend, Zach, join the interview at this time)

1770: Hello Ashleigh. Do you mind me asking you a couple of questions?

ASHLEIGH: No.

1770: Do you remember the phone call that morning?

ASHLEIGH: I didn't get a phone call.

1770: How did you find out about it?

ASHLEIGH: (Ashleigh becomes very emotional)

1770: You don't have to do this if you don't want to.

ZACH: Phil called me that morning. I was at work. It was around 9am. I got his message and could tell by the sound of his voice that something was wrong. I called him back and he told me that Shelby had been killed in a car wreck. He asked me if Ashleigh was at home. I told him she was at work. He asked me if I could go tell her. He didn't want to call her because he didn't want her to drive. I was in downtown Denison at the time and had to drive to Sherman where she works. Even though it was a relatively short drive it seemed like it took me hours to get there.

1770: What was going through your mind as you were driving?

ZACH: It was weird. I was crying, but no tears were falling. I was just at a complete loss for words. I didn't know what I was going to tell her. I didn't know how I was going to explain it to her. I just got there and pulled up at her work. Ashleigh was so excited to see me. She thought I was just stopping by to say hi.

ASHLEIGH: He walked in and I had a smile from ear-to-ear and just thought

how sweet it was that he stopped by to say hi. He said to me that something terrible had happened. He came around the counter and grabbed me. I asked him what happened. He told me, "Shelby. She was killed." I just lost it. I can't tell you what I did from that point on. I don't know.

1770: Did you ask what happened?

ASHLEIGH: He said she was killed in a car wreck on her way to school. That was it.

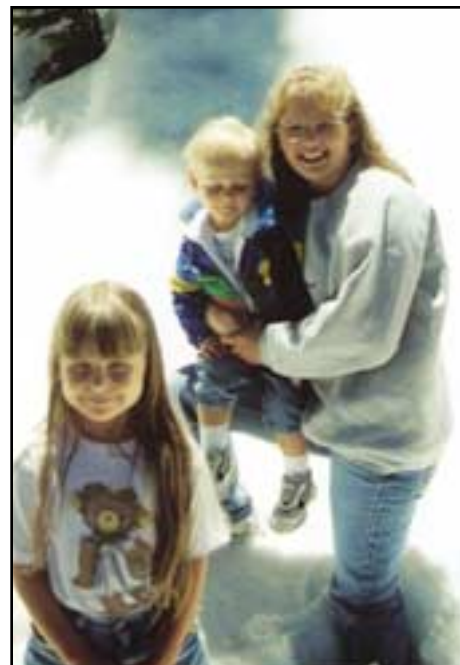
1770: Did you go to the scene?

ASHLEIGH AND ZACH: Yes. We both did.

PHIL: We were trying to get Sheila to a place where she was a little more comfortable and protected. We didn't want her picture to be on the evening news. So we moved her over into the back of the ambulance. She didn't want to sit inside the ambulance so we pulled vehicles around it so she was shielded.

1770: How and when did you tell your son?

PHIL: The people from the school were just absolutely tremendous to us. There were already rumors going around the school about the wreck. I was in contact with the Assistant Superintendent who was at the scene of the accident with me. He was calling back and forth to the school to let me know what Ryan's situation was. I didn't want Ryan to hear this from anybody but me. We finally got Sheila to the point where we could take her home, which took a while. During



that time the school was moving Ryan from one place to another so he would not hear the rumors. They moved him to the counselor's office. There were only a few teachers that were able to talk with him because all the others were so emotional. They all knew Shelby and had taught her just a couple of years earlier. As soon as I got Sheila home, I left her with numerous friends and family and headed to the school to get Ryan. It was very difficult because I had to drive back past the accident scene. When I got there Ashleigh and Ryan were just pulling up. Consoling Ashleigh was extremely difficult as well. I told them I had to leave because I needed to go get Ryan. I pulled onto the highway to head to the school and hadn't driven even a quarter of a mile when my phone rang. It was the Police Chief, Brett. He told me they needed me back at the scene because the funeral director needed to talk with me. Nothing gets more real. I turned back around and drove back there. (Phil has to pause at this point as he is overcome with emotion.) The questions from the funeral director regarding Shelby's body were just more than I could deal with at that point, so I told them I had to leave right then and

go get my son. I left and headed to the school. When I pulled in, the principal happened to be standing near the front door and saw me pull into the parking lot. She went in and got Ryan for me. He climbed up into my truck. He thought I was there to surprise him with something fun. As soon as he got into the truck he could tell something was wrong with me. I told him that Shelby had a car wreck. He asked if she was going to be ok. I told him no, that she had already gone to be with Jesus. He started crying and we just held each other. There were several people watching from inside the school and they were all crying. A couple of the teachers came out to tell us how sorry they were and to ask if there was anything they could do for us. We just sat there for a long time, and then started back home. I didn't want to drive by the scene of the accident with Ryan, so we took another route to our house. We had driven about a mile down the road when Ryan said, "Did she suffer?" I told him she was killed instantly so she did not suffer.

INFO: Does that give you all peace of mind to know that she did not suffer?

ALL: Yes.

PHIL: We couldn't have stood for her to suffer. Not even for a second.

INFO: Ashleigh, what do remember most about your little sister?

ASHLEIGH: She was just so full of life. She always had a smile on her face. She always asked dingy questions. She was a character.

INFO: It is very unusual that a family would want to do an interview like this so soon after a tragedy such as this. Why did you want to do this?

PHIL: We don't want anyone else to suffer the pain. The feelings we have is something we would never wish on our worse enemy.

INFO: Does this help?

PHIL: At five minutes till 8 o'clock on May 15th my daughter said, "Bye Daddy, I love you." Five minutes later she could never say that to me again.

INFO: Sheila, did Shelby ever talk about what she wanted to do with her life?

(Everyone starts laughing)

ASHLEIGH: Depends on what day of the week it was!

SHEILA: Shelby changed her mind often. Whatever she happened to be doing at the time is what she wanted to do the



rest of her life. One day she told me she was going to be a choreographer, then she was going to be a radiologist, then I explained to her how much dedication it takes to be a specialized doctor, so she changed her mind real quick. (All laugh)

PHIL: She would go from radiologist to cosmetologist pretty fast! No matter what Shelby decided to do with her life, she was going to touch people. One of the things that she did, that as a father of a sixteen year old girl I didn't like very much, was no matter who it was, a friend, an acquaintance, or just about anybody, whenever she would say goodbye to them she always said, "I love you" to them. The reason for that is that she had lost a friend of hers a year before her death from a drowning accident at the lake. She told someone that the reason she always told people she loved them is because she loved this friend, but never told him before he died. So, she made it a point to tell people that all the time.

INFO: So, you want to remind everyone to be more like Shelby and tell those close to you how much you love them because they may not be here tomorrow?

SHEILA: I would get on to her and say, "Shelby, don't tell people you love them casually like that. Those are serious words. Don't just say that to be saying it. Why do you say that?" She said, "Mom, I do love them." I was at a loss for words on that one. How could I argue with her?

INFO: How are you dealing with this loss?

SHEILA: We go to the cemetery every day about 8 o'clock. I go in her room every night before I go to bed. It's the last thing I do. Sometimes I write letters to her and poetry. Sometimes I just sit there and look around her beautiful room like in some crazy way I am just waiting for her to come home.

INFO: Do you find yourself being over protective of Ashleigh and Ryan?

SHEILA: Ashleigh lives about five minutes away and for the longest I would say, "Call me when you get home."

ASHLEIGH: I live five minutes away now.

SHEILA: With Ryan, I don't want him spending the night with people or riding in the car with them. It worries me.

PHIL: Not long after the accident, Pottsville High School was in the state

baseball playoffs. Ryan wanted to go. My friend Brett asked me if he could take him. We talked about it and Sheila wasn't comfortable letting him go without me. We are definitely more protective.

SHEILA: We had planned a family cruise this summer, but of course cancelled it. The timing has been really hard for Ryan because he and Shelby had made out a list of things they wanted to do at the different islands. Shelby's number one thing was to swim with the dolphins.

INFO: Do you beat yourself up asking, "what if" or, "what if I had done this?"

ASHLEIGH: My biggest thing is that I was absent from Shelby's life for 7-8 years when I was battling my drug addiction. I had been back in her life for the last two years after I got clean. I regret missing those years.

PHIL: I try not to beat myself up. It was just a terrible, terrible accident. We taught Shelby well. She was a good kid.

SHEILA: She was a safe driver. She was always looking for an excuse to drive, like going to the store. It was funny because we would sit on the porch and

One-On-One Continued on Page 32



watch her as she got everything just right, her sunglasses on, her music just right, and her window down. She would get out by the mailbox, stop and turn her blinker on. Phil and I would just crack up laughing!

PHIL: It was like she was letting everyone on our driveway know she was turning right! (All laugh) She was careful and didn't get in a hurry.

ZACH: I remember one night we all went to Cheddar's and met up there in all separate vehicles. Sheila and Shelby were in Shelby's car and she was backing out of the parking space. We were in our car just laughing because it probably took her 10 minutes to back up!

INFO: What would you say to parents reading this interview?

SHEILA: Tell your children every single day that you love them. Don't ever go to bed mad. If you are fussing and fighting, call a truce, go to bed and then pick up the next day, if necessary. Just always remember that your children never really belong to you, they belong to God. When he deems it necessary, he will take them.

INFO: I appreciate you sharing Shelby's life with us. You are able to remember and laugh and that's good. You know, like saying "dingy" questions.

PHIL: Because of some of her questions, we have a family joke that someone is

having a "Shelby Moment" if they say something dingy, kind of like a "blonde moment." (All laugh)

SHEILA: One other thing I want to add is that at her funeral 300 pink balloons were released. Pink was her favorite color.

PHIL: "Think Pink" was Shelby's saying. If she talked to anyone that was having a bad day, she would tell them, "Think Pink" because you can't say that without smiling.

ASHLEIGH: She stayed the night with me just two weeks before she died and she told me, "Ya know, if I ever die, I want all of my friends to release pink balloons at my funeral." I said, "Shelby, shut up. Why are you talking like that? You're sixteen. You're supposed to be talking about what you want at your wedding or something." I didn't think much about it until two weeks later.



ZACH: Trees surround her grave. When the balloons were released, they got stuck in the trees, but not a single one popped. They all worked their way out of the branches without popping.

INFO: That gives me chills. I think people know beforehand that something is going to happen to them, even though they are not consciously aware of it. Sheila and Phil, I know you don't like to drive past the accident site, but for you Ashleigh it's different. Why?

ASHLEIGH: Yes. The first time I went that way it was because I wanted to see what Shelby had seen last. But now, it is more of a life check for me. It reminds me that at any moment my life could be over.

INFO: Thank you all. You will touch everyone who reads this interview.

