

Brittany Joy Lindstrom
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Words from Rev. Dawn E. Reichard
Christ By the Sea United Methodist Church

Her name was Brittany JOY. I can imagine how she got that middle name: a new mother seeing that beautiful infant girl and feeling such "joy!" It must have felt quite natural, almost essential, to include that emotion in the child's naming. Joy is what Brittany brought not only into her mother's life, but also that of all her family and friends. Joy is a large part of what added to Brittany's beauty. Yes, she had a gorgeous appearance, but she had an inner beauty that was enhanced by the joy she found in life and shared with others.

When you think of where Brittany found her joy in life, the obvious place to look is ... in the barn! Horses weren't just a casual past-time, something to do now and then. Horses were her passion. Whether riding on the beach, the Sebastian buffer or open pasture, Brittany was in a state of pure joy when she was on Simba or Vegas. Riding English style, Brittany was an accomplished jumper. She could fly over 5 foot fences, and recently won Grand Champion at the West Palm International Festival. She was a polo player for the Pointe West Polo Club. Brittany's experience with riding began at the age of 5; you couldn't keep her out of the barn. Some might say she loved horses more than people. But maybe it was that horses became some of her closest friends - and remained so through the years. In fact, some of the humans closest to Brittany were those who shared her love of horses.

One of Brittany's dreams was to one day enter the Olympics as an equestrian. She certainly had the kind of focus that could've helped her reach that goal. Whatever she wanted to do, she wanted to be the best at it. She was a natural at athletics. In school she was the volleyball team's~ MVP two years running. In 2007, Brittany was the all around women's snowboarding champion in the giant slalom race in Vermont. Brittany also had a sharp mind. She excelled in school, whether at St. Ed's or Indian River Charter High School. Upon her graduation in 2007 she was awarded the Bright Future Scholarship for academic achievement.

Bright, beautiful and athletic, tall and tough, Brittany did whatever she set out to do. Yet, Brittany was soft and gentle inside. While she had taken this year to devote to her riding, her long-range goal was to go to college and eventually become ... can you guess ... a veterinarian! She loved working as a vet tech beside her role model and close friend veterinarian Valerie Biehl. Brittany once delivered a foal. She was known to have slept in the stall with a sick horse. Those who knew Brittany best - sensed how natural and well suited Brittany would be as a vet. Whether with her mother or friends from the Rubidoux Stables, Brittany's first love was riding. But in addition to horses, she loved all kinds of animals. Brittany was fond of dogs, including those of her close friend, Joe. Together they'd hog hunt! As unusual as that might sound, it just illustrates the great diversity and sense of adventure that was a part of Brittany's makeup ... and her joy. And Brittany Joy remained her mother's joy, as the two of them shared so many experiences together: riding motorcycles, scuba diving and playing golf.

Brittany loved country music. She could sing every song; she knew all the words. Her grandfather also described her charming sense of humor. Steve recalled the time he told Brittany, "You're in the doghouse now." She literally crawled into the doghouse and

posed with her chin resting on her hands. No doubt about it, Brittany was multidimensional. She seemed so full of life, of love, of JOY.

But there were also some dark life experiences etched into her soul, even if unknown to those around her. Brittany traveled with her grandmother to visit her uncle Christopher who was dying. It was a painful time. But not all death experiences are physical. While Brittany had received many valued gifts in life, some of the most valued ones were only fleeting, ripped away from her. Heartbreak and disappointments mounted. At her relatively young age, she knew grief that even her middle name or outward smile couldn't erase. If we live long enough, we all learn that there are unavoidable things in this world that leave us hurt, lost and alone. For some it is so overwhelming that we feel desperately hopeless. We come face to face with the truth that there are situations that even the brightest, the toughest, the strongest, the seemingly most joyful of us - can't fix. At such times, some people look beyond themselves for something bigger, wiser, stronger, more perfect and powerful. In the church world, we call such folks 'seekers'. That's how Brittany's family described her. Brittany Joy went to church with her grandparents as a child. There were times she'd attend here with her mother. While we can't speak with certainty about where Brittany was in her spiritual journey, there seemed to be some belief in God.

Brittany once asked her grandmother, a devout Roman Catholic, why she prayed. Cathy responded, "Faith is very important when you need something to hang on to." The truth is a lot of people don't give too much thought, time or energy to the exploration of ultimate life questions. We delay or cancel our spiritual journey because things of the spirit seem so ethereal - maybe unreal - compared to this world's array of interests and opportunities. And faith journeys don't command our attention quite the way worldly challenges and perplexing relationships do. Then one day something happens within us. Perhaps it's when we reach our thirties and begin to grasp the notion of our own mortality. We start to ask bigger, deeper questions: philosophical, even theological questions. Perhaps we seek and learn from those who are more aware than we are of something or some One who is as close as the very air we breathe, who is our very Source. If we stay on the journey, we find a Love greater than any we've ever known, an Answer to questions we couldn't even ask, a Satisfaction beyond what even the most desirable of earthly things can offer, and a Joy, a Joy that is sustainable when every other joy in this world has left us. It would be a great understatement to say that joy is not the dominant emotion of this day. Our sense of personal loss is too great, too close to the surface, to feel the joy we once experienced around Brittany. God not only understands our grief, but shares in it. God grieves what Brittany had to offer that this world will now never fully know. But I also believe that Brittany Joy Lindstrom's inner Light that brought so much joy to our lives is not snuffed out. The very best parts of Brittany's life and joy will remain alive in our hearts to comfort and inspire us. And there's something more. For Brittany, the true and eternal Joy that eluded her tender young soul in this world, is now made complete and whole. I believe that is what we experience in the presence of God: pure and unbounded Joy. Oh, that she would have come to fully know that quality of joy while in this life. We can only imagine that a different outcome might have resulted. But our solace is now in trusting that God has found Brittany in a way that answers all her unasked questions and comforts all her unspoken pain. Brittany Joy is now more fully living into her middle name than she had ever displayed to any of us.

And so I encourage all of you to hold dear in your hearts Brittany's joy and laughter, her giftedness and accomplishments, her beauty and love. Remember the good times that were, but especially center your thoughts on the hope of Amazing Grace, Heavenly

Peace, and Unending Joy that she will at last find in the Presence of God. May Brittany's al-too-short life inspire us to jumpstart the spiritual dimension of our own journeys. For God does not withhold His holy gifts until some afterlife, but offers them to all who will enter His Presence - right now.

Let us praise God that Brittany's true Heavenly Source is now her Eternal End - which paradoxically, our faith tells us is a new and everlasting Beginning! May the grace of our Lord Jesus, the Love of God, and the Presence of the Holy Spirit be with Brittany - and all of us - forever more. AMEN.