

CANDACE HOUSE

Fall Newsletter
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FINDING HUMANITY AT CANDACE HOUSE

In January of 2015, the life of Chris Baur was taken. Nearly five years later, in November of 2019, the trial for the accused finally began. During the two weeks of these court proceedings, Chris's family stayed with us at Candace House. A few months later, they graciously agreed to share some of their experiences at our fundraising dinner. Below is the speech that was given by Chris's aunt, Kathy.

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Words. Our society today is big on words and phrases. You see them everywhere - breathe, be happy, this is us. Inspirational words as it were. Candace House's list of words in their values are compassion, respect, empowerment, integrity, collaboration, social justice, diversity and inclusion.

One word for me that encompasses what Candace House lives and breathes and bursts at its seams with- humanity. The dictionary defines *humanize* as the ability to make things more humane and easier for humans to understand. To make something less unpleasant and more suitable for people.

The importance of this word is readily apparent to anyone who has had a loved one murdered in their lives. *You become dehumanized with murder. You learn to doubt that there will ever be ANYTHING in your life that approaches what your former beliefs entailed. About what defines humanity and what are the characteristics of a human being.* You are now THAT family. The one who people whisper about and say "how sad" behind your back but do not know what to say to your face. The dehumanizing process has begun. And it continues.

Your loved one's body no longer belongs to his family but becomes a part of the court process. A piece of evidence per se. Yours not to view that final time until permitted. The funeral is only planned when the body is released from evidence. Chris's body did not attend his funeral- he was still in the morgue. No viewing of his remains was allowed. He was sealed in plastic and decomposed so badly that by law it could not be opened.

The word non-human becomes synonymous with your person- no rights existed for him or his family after his death. The "remains" becomes a detailed report of injuries. And he became labelled with other words - victim, deceased, fatality, casualty. No more Chris. No more son. No more grandson, nephew, cousin, friend, lover.

The indignities of the pretrial court proceedings were a mockery of "humane" behaviour. In the newer part of the law courts, the courtroom is exhausting. Dark, with poor lighting, low ceilings, no windows. A large viewing gallery that quickly became filled with groups of high school students and onlookers. Anyone allowed to witness our pain.

The family room provided for us was a facsimile of the court- small dark room, small dark couch, small dark table. There was a kitchenette, unstocked of course, so the Wordsworth cafeteria, ten minutes away, was our only source of refreshment. By the time all of us placed our coats and belongings in the family room, there was no place to sit. Cold and uninviting, it certainly did not ease any tensions.

This is the place we came to after we heard the taped confession. When the explicit coroners' report was read in court- the brutalized slaying of Chris laid out in detail while we sat in stupefied shock and horror. I am sure anyone in the courtroom that day did not mistake whose Chris's family was.

Candace House was a turning point in the tribulations of the trial process.

There is a saying three times is a charm. Three times the trial was delayed. The trial was now booked for November 2019. And that's when we hit the jackpot. Chris's mom, Kim, read in the paper about Candace House opening and immediately asked our victims advocate about booking it for our trial. It was granted- the whole two week time period.

The entryway with its innocuous desk and wall of pamphlets completely masked the living space behind it. I was speechless when the door to the sanctuary opened and the living space hidden begged us to enter and explore. *It was like coming into someone's home. Two huge eating areas, a kitchen with regular-sized appliances, a welcoming sitting area with a library, a huge living area with a sectional that could surely seat twelve. Even a private room tucked away- complete with a bed if needed.* And the very best part- the two staff, Cecily and Taylor, who greeted us each day with empathy and kindness. I knew it was going to be good.

It was initially hard to digest that we would be able to relax and stay here. It would be our "place" during the trial. We could actually request meals, order in, or bring food to be reheated. All of it ready for us when we got "home" from court, which was only a ten-minute walk away. And the staff would come with us to court each day. It was such a sense of relief that this would now become our space and the staff, our people. So Candace House became a positive part of the dreaded trial process.

But Candace House was to become much more; it became the place where I learned that there is some humanity in the court system. We came daily to our haven and sat as a large group at the table. To eat, talk and review the court proceedings of that morning. Where we could remind ourselves we could be human. It was ok to laugh and cry about things, to review the love we all shared for Chris. There was no criticism. No one to gnaw at our image of who Chris was to us. No expectations of the right way to behave, as there was not a "right way" to behave. No jury members eating next to us or reporters watching our every move or busy lawyers coming and going.

This was now our fortress; our place of safety; our hideaway.

The staff facilitated our talk and made things easy for us in a very unobtrusive way. They were our resources when we had questions about what to expect in the court. But it was not all seriousness. We laughed about the cockroaches we imagined running rampant in the old buildings around us. Kim cemented that laughter into gales of hilarity when she tossed a gummy bear in the air and failed to catch it in her mouth. We all looked down at the carpet where it lay and in our minds it became a cockroach running across the floor. Hysteria - ultimately stress release - ensued.

Then there were the quiet contemplative times when the girls reached out to one of us in need and made it easier for us to breathe since you hold your breath through the whole trial.

All our individual needs were considered and met. Discovering Chris's brother had a love of dogs, Asher the therapy dog appeared the next morning. And the compassion that was shown when the verdict came through and my niece burst into tears.



Chris Baur, joyful and loved.

We left Candace House each day with a smile and with a boost to our spirits that made it easier to come back the next day to face the living hell of that courtroom. Candace House became a matter of course to us. A privilege. A place to identify ourselves. A place to connect with each other and to have our hosts respect and care for us. We were honoured that staff became part of Chris's family. And I do not think that that feeling of honour will ever leave me or any of us who endured Chris's trial.

I know that Candace House is nothing but a place. But that physical place became transformed by the people that work there. It was a place of serenity and comfort with the ability to calm restless spirits and minds assaulted by trauma. It is a place that is humanized and offers the victims of murdered loved ones the opportunity to once again glimpse that the human spirit is resilient.

I cannot say enough about what Candace House has meant to me and to all of us. The staff are living and breathing examples that compassion and caring can transform a program, ideas and a place into a reality of beauty and human kindness.

To all those that donate and are involved in Candace House, this refuge provides much-needed help to those in distress and mental anguish. My biggest hope is that it becomes recognized and valued and takes its rightful place across Canada-even the world.

- Kathy



COURAGE, COVID & CANDACE HOUSE: AN UPDATE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This past year began in a flurry of activity, with the months that lay ahead filled with families that would be needing the support of Candace House. At the end of February, we had just wrapped up another successful fundraising gala as the word COVID-19 was starting to swirl.

Two weeks later, the WHO had officially declared a global pandemic. Sitting next to a mother in court, I was heartbroken by thoughts of what might lay ahead. With so many unknowns, there would be some difficult decisions to make.

Like others, we decided to close our office and cease providing in-person services in March. Over the next couple of months, staff worked from home and used the time to take on several projects that have been of tremendous value both internally and for the victims, survivors and families we connect with. We also continued providing support to those impacted by violence however we could. Reaching out by phone, email and social media.

We were humbled by the strength and resilience we saw in the face of growing challenges, though we heard repeatedly that coping with grief and trauma was exacerbated by the pandemic. There was increased difficulty in accessing resources and professional support. Victims and survivors now faced additional financial burdens on top of those already being carried due to the crime. Funeral and memorial service options were limited. Restrictions prohibiting loved ones from gathering together, limiting the much-needed hugs of warmth and love and increasing feelings of isolation.

With the announcements in May of Manitoba beginning to ease restrictions, we prepared to re-open our doors. We launched an appeal asking for support to make the necessary updates to our space and to purchase the many items that would be needed. The generosity and words of care that were received in response was overwhelming.

Over the summer, court proceedings and justice-related appointments slowly picked up, though things now looked a bit different. Physical distancing measures were implemented and masks became mandatory. Where families had previously been able to attend court with as many friends and supporters as the room could hold, only two individuals at a time from a victims' family were now allowed.

At Candace House, we introduced similar measures. Reducing our capacity to ensure distancing while still working to maintain flexibility, making masks available for use, and dramatically increasing our cleaning routines. We also continue to provide nourishing snacks and meals but have adapted how we do this.

While these changes have posed some challenges, we take seriously the responsibility of ensuring the health and safety of all those accessing Candace House to the greatest extent we can. We know that the violent loss of a loved one has a profound impact on all aspects of life, including physical health. Sometimes ravaging the body and its ability to fight back. Each new measure is carefully thought through to reduce the risk of spreading COVID, and to do so in a way that also continues to promote emotional, relational and spiritual wellbeing.

Now in fall, court schedules have returned to near normal with September having been extraordinarily busy as multiple homicide matters were proceeding concurrently. Although Candace House was not able to accommodate all families in our space, we made every effort to connect and address needs how we could.

Looking ahead to the coming months and year, the schedule of upcoming proceedings and families needing refuge and care is full. As limits remain on the number of people allowed in court, we anticipate family members spending even more time at Candace House. Taking turns attending proceedings and waiting for their loved ones to return from court to talk through and debrief together what happened.

While the future is unknown with tighter restrictions always possible, and as we navigate the challenge of dramatically reduced donations, we plan to continue providing compassion and care however we can. We know that now more than ever comfort and safety is needed and we ask for your support in making this possible. Your gift, no matter what size, makes such a difference.

As we look around our community, we are encouraged and inspired by how people, businesses and organizations are coming together, and by the support and words of kindness that Candace House has received. On behalf of the many victims, survivors and families who have found refuge and care because of your generosity, we want to sincerely thank you for all you have done and continue to do.

With warmest regards,

Cecilly Hildebrand
Executive Director

VICTIMS WEEK 2020: LIVE VIRTUAL TOURS & SHARING SURVIVOR STORIES



Victims and Survivors of Crime Week is an annual outreach initiative of the Justice Canada Policy Centre for Victim Issues (PCVI), taking place this year from November 22-28, 2020.

This week is dedicated to working to give victims and survivors a more effective voice in the criminal system, and to raise awareness about the challenges and needs that exist, as well as the services, assistance and laws in place to help.

This year, Candace House is taking part in Victims and Survivors of Crime Week by working to Recognize Courage through sharing the stories and art of victims, survivors and families. These will be shared throughout Victims Week on our website and social media pages.

If you are a victim, survivor or family member, and would like to share your story, we would love to hear from you. Find out more by visiting www.candacehouse.ca/survivor-stories.

We will also be hosting live virtual tours. This will be an opportunity for us to share personally about the impact Candace House is having and Renew our Commitment to providing comfort and refuge for victims, survivors and families.

Sign up for a live virtual tour today by visiting www.candacehouse.ca/victimsweek2020.

THANK YOU!

A huge heartfelt thank you to Toby (left) who donated this stunning quilt in memory of Judy Kenny. Toby, along with Judy's family and friends, stayed at Candace House during the two weeks of trial proceedings. We are honoured and humbled by the strong and resilient families who continue to give back so generously.



We also wanted to take a moment to thank our amazing community for all the support we have received in the past year.

The donations, calls, texts, emails, and drop-ins have shown us how dedicated our community is to supporting victims and survivors of violent crime

While Candace House continues to see a decrease in donations due to COVID-19, we are so grateful for the generosity of our community. A huge thank you to all of our donors.

- \$50,000 Province of Manitoba
- \$36,000 Winnipeg Foundation
- \$7,600 Government of Canada
- \$7,000 Anonymous Donor
- \$5,000 Assiniboine Credit Union
- \$5,000 Gay Lea Foundation

And to many donors that took part in our COVID campaign and beyond, thank you!

None of this would be possible without you.

Consider making a donation today.
Your support changes lives, and that changes everything.

Donate online by visiting www.candacehouse.ca/donate
or by mailing your tax-deductible donation to the address below.

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