

Family Transforms Tragedy Into Hope For Others

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Lancaster Farming Staff
MYERSTOWN (Lebanon Co.)

The death of Renee Layser was a horrible tragedy. The senseless murder could have left family members bitter and angry forever. Instead, the family strives to turn their tragic loss into something positive.

On the evening of May 2, a memorial dinner was held for Renee in which more than \$104,000 was raised for the Brethren Disaster Relief Fund.

Renee was 19 years old and six months pregnant when she was murdered by a former boyfriend.

Renee had graduated from Eastern Lebanon County High School in 1992 and was employed as a bank teller for Lebanon Valley National Bank and as a Longaberger Basket consultant.

People who knew and loved Renee said that she had a pleasant smile and a friendly personality. She was known as a thoughtful young woman who took time to help others.

Her death shocked Lebanon countians where she grew up. Many expressed outrage that the murderer could not receive the death penalty because at that time, for a case to receive a death penalty, the list of aggravating circumstances required that more than one person be killed. An unborn child was not considered a person. Renee's case caused Sen. Chip Brightbill to introduce legislature

that changed the laws. Now killing a pregnant woman would result in a death sentence.

But Renee's parents, John and Nancy Layser, and grandparents Carl and Margaret Wenger, said that as practicing Brethren who stress non-violence. They do not believe it is right to take a life for whatever reason.

"We miss Renee. We think of her every day," said Rose Walmer, an aunt and spokesperson for the family. "He made a horrible mistake that ruined his life and his family's, and left an emptiness in our life. But anger and bitterness won't change that."

The accused is sentenced to life imprisonment for the crime that he committed on August 13, 1994.

The family said that they treasure all the joy and love that Renee brought into their lives.

"She and her baby are with the Lord. What better place to be? That's what we dwell on," Walmer said.

Renee's death prompted her grandfather Carl Wenger who founded Wengers of Myerstown, a construction and agriculture equipment facility, to establish The Wenger Foundation, Inc., which helped fund the memorial dinner. A percentage of the Wenger business profits will continue to fund the ongoing foundation, which will provide for educational, religious, and community projects.



Donna Derr, director of Disaster and Refugee Programs, expressed gratefulness for the money raised at the memorial dinner for the Brethren Disaster Relief Fund. Numerous items such as quilts and Longaberger baskets were auctioned at the dinner. More than \$104,000 was raised.

More than 800 people attended the memorial, cosponsored by the Wenger family (grandparents of Renee) and Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Burkholder, owners of Dutch Valley Food Distributors and chairpersons for the Brethren Relief Auction.

Held at Lebanon Valley Exposition Center at the Lebanon Area

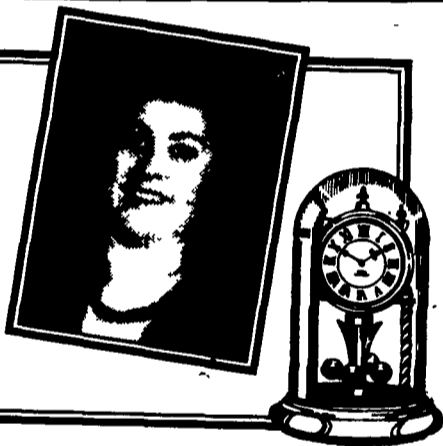
Fairgrounds, the entertainment at the dinner was provided by southern gospel musicians The Anchor-men and Kirk Talley, and by ventriloquist Geraldine and Rickey.

All money raised through individual tickets, which sold for \$100 each, and through the auction of several quilts, Longaberger baskets, and other items went to

the relief fund. The fund will be used to enable families to rebuild their homes and lives after a natural disaster.

"Our family shares a rich heritage in the Brethren faith and we have long been ardent supporters of the Brethren Disaster Relief Fund," Wenger said of the family's decision to support the fund.

Taking Time by Rebecca Escott



Tackling

Transportation Expenses

If your family expenses this month are out of balance because of increased transportation costs, you're not alone! For some reason (hotly debated in the media and government), gasoline prices have spiked recently. Families with teen-age drivers, retirees who love to travel, and employees with long commutes have suddenly found their wallets emptying faster than usual when they stop by the gas pump.

What can consumers do? Two things — conserve fuel and reduce overall transportation expenses and speak out about your dissatisfaction and concerns.

First, all families can stretch their transportation resources. Make sure that you check your tire pressure on all your vehicles at least once a month. You can save up to \$100 a year on gas by keeping your engine tuned and tires inflated properly, underinflated tires can rob drivers of one mile a gallon of gas consumed. The Earth Works Group, a conservation group, reports the 50-80 percent of tires in the United States are underinflated. Properly inflated tires also wear longer. This means you get more for the money you spent on them.

Secondly, practice gentle driving. Energy consumption studies show that slow starts and gradual stops as well as overall reduced speeds of travel save on fuel con-

sumption. Driving more patiently may also reduce the stress that a rushed, pressuring lifestyle creates.

In addition to driving gently, consumers can save fuel by cutting down on the times they leave their cars idling. Allowing a car to idle any longer than one minute consumes more fuel than if the driver shut it off and started it again when she was ready to drive.

Plan your errands and chauffeuring. Cut down on at least one car trip each week. When possible, now that the weather is pleasant and it stays lighter later in the evening, walk or ride a bike instead of driving your car on a short trip. The average family can save \$74 per year by making one less trip per week in the car.

Families can also lower their overall transportation costs by evaluating their current auto insurance policies. A survey done by a personal finance magazine several years ago found that auto insurance prices offered by different insurance companies to people who live in the same area, have the same accident history and drive the same type of automobile can vary by as much as 100 percent! It pays to comparison shop. So when it's time to renew your auto insurance, take some time to get three or four estimates. Select the most cost-effective one. That doesn't necessarily mean the lowest cost. It means selecting the least expensive policy for the best coverage.

Both aspects need to be considered.

While you're contacting your insurance agent, ask what financial savings you could achieve by raising your collision deductible to at least \$500. For individuals who own older vehicles, you may want to drop your collision coverage (and put the savings in the bank) because the blue book value on older cars often does not justify the premium expense.

And finally, to decrease transportation expenses, make fuel efficiency a high priority the next time you purchase a car.

In addition to practicing wise energy conservation, this may be a good time to try out that underused consumer voice of yours. Find out as much information as possible. Ask questions of your local gas station manager, congressmen. Listen to informed discussions of the issue. Then pick up your phone, pen, or turn on your computer and contact your government representatives. Express your frustration and concern with the skyrocketing prices. Provide them with a few specifics like how your expenses have increased from two months ago or chart local stations prices. Perhaps comment on things such as how increases in these prices will affect your families travel (and purchasing) plans or how it has eaten into your family's take-home wages.

In an issue such as this one, there are always mixed messages and differing explanations. Every consumer needs to express his or her opinion about what these costs mean. Let all the involved parties know how the changes affect you and what ACTION you are taking (for example, deliberating cutting down on fuel consumption, choosing not to patronize a business, etc.).

Tackling the family transportation budget head on and making changes can save substantial money.

Water Quality Workshop

SCRANTON (Lackawanna Co.) — Did you know the quality of spring water can be affected by changes in temperature, rainfall, and runoff? Bacteria and nitrate levels can change over a short period of time.

Water testing is the only way to ensure that wells and springs are safe. Dangerous contaminants such as lead, nitrate, radon, and

organic chemicals cannot be detected by taste or smell.

Penn State Cooperative Extension of Lackawanna County will hold a Safe Drinking Water Clinic on Saturday, May 18, from 2:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. Reduced water testing rates will be offered. For more information or to register for the free workshop, call the Extension office at (717) 963-4761.

Rhubarb Fest To Be Held May 18

The annual Rhubarb Fest will be held on May 18 at Kitchen Kettle Village in Intercourse. The Fest is a culinary experience extraordinaire. Plus there is a great roster of rhubarb-inspired festivities — from the World's Only Rhubarb Car Derby (mini dragsters are made of rhubarb stalks and electronically timed for the fastest finish) to the Best Rhubarb Pie contest, rhubarb Pie Throw, Quilting Beed, and Rhubarb Arcade of Games.

It's a family affair that offers something to see, taste, and do — as long as it involves — Rhubarb!

For a free copy of the Kitchen Kettle Village Festivals Brochure, call 1 800-717-6198.

RHUBARB MAPLE MUFFINS

- 1½ cups diced rhubarb
- 2½ cups flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon allspice
- ½ cup maple syrup
- ½ cup milk
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 6 tablespoons margarine
- 1 egg

Combine rhubarb and sugar. Let stand one hour. Combine flour, salt, baking powder, allspice, and cinnamon. Cream margarine, syrup and egg. Blend in the milk. Mix rhubarb and dry ingredients, mixing only until combined. Spoon into 12 muffin tins lined with muffin papers. Bake at 400 degrees for 20 minutes.