

Tanna - Written by Tyla Petersen

When the KIDS Network asked if my family would be interested in being the 2021 Step Up for KIDS Ambassador Family, I hesitated. I had only been on the board and Step Up committee for a few months. I thought, surely it's been too long ago for our story to make an impact? Would my family be okay with that attention after so long? It has been 21 years after all. After putting it off for awhile, I talked to my mom about it and she was okay with it.

I have put off writing the story for a lot longer than I know I should have. I even tried getting my grandparents to write the story. My grandma remembers me crying after the funeral, simply because I left something in the pew. My grandpa remembers picking my mom up from work and taking her to the daycare. I remember hearing that Grandma Bob, a close, family friend, picked up my dad and drove him to the daycare.

I was six when my sister, Tanna, passed away. Too young to know what was going on, but old enough to know it was not a good thing. I was at daycare, taking a nap when I was woken up and someone said 'Grandma is here to pick you up.' I was excited, Grandma only picked me up when Mom and Dad were going to do something. We drove home, or what I thought was home, but I stayed in the car. I remember flashes of light from the ambulance, not knowing what was going on. I remember not seeing my mom or dad for a couple days and staying with my grandparents. I remember the orange shag carpet at the funeral home and strange people coming up to me and saying they were sorry. It was a long time before I could figure out what everyone was sorry for.

We started attending Step Up for KIDS when it was Step Up for SIDS. We attended the first one and have attended every year since - rain or shine. I remember being at Cessna Stadium in the rain and cold. We still did the Memorial Walk to her picture. This event has grown to be a full family affair. Extended family and friends travel to Wichita to participate. This event is our way of remembering and honoring Tanna.

As an adult, the KIDS Network has really helped me to come full circle with understanding how much of heartbreaking ordeal SIDS can be. We witness our parents dealing with an existential loss and recovering from it, but it is rare for the siblings to have an explanation for how this impacts them and the recovery process. It is a club no parent wants to join. However, it's a club the siblings want absolutely no part of either and don't fully understand the 'club' until much later in life.

Since joining the KIDS Network Board of Directors and the Step Up Committee, I have a much greater understanding and appreciation for what my parents were going through before the Network started. My parents relied on their friends and family to help them get through the loss and I know we will forever be thankful for that. Petersen's Posse will always be thankful for the KIDS Network. For the work they are doing, the awareness they are spreading, and the support they continue to show to families experiencing loss.