

# Lisa's Light helps parents deal with teenage addiction

*Family's loss prompts them to help others battle alcohol and drug addiction*

By **Pat Kumpan**

**J**udy and Gary Stoeffen never knew they'd be putting their heart and soul into a Web site called Lisa's Light about addiction, alcohol and drug prevention.

But they are passionate about providing a place where parents can turn to help struggling teen-agers, or teens themselves can use links to information about addiction and recovery.

The Web site, [lisas-light.com](http://lisas-light.com), serves as a tribute to their daughter, Lisa Marie Stoeffen, 21. She was killed in a car accident in the early morning hours of Jan. 3 on Moonsong Court in Rancho Bernardo.

Lisa was driving herself home when her car went out of control at nearly 90 m.p.h., down a hill and smashed into a stone wall in a neighbor's yard — just two blocks from home.

Later, toxicology reports indicated that she had consumed three times the blood alcohol content a driver is legally permitted in California.

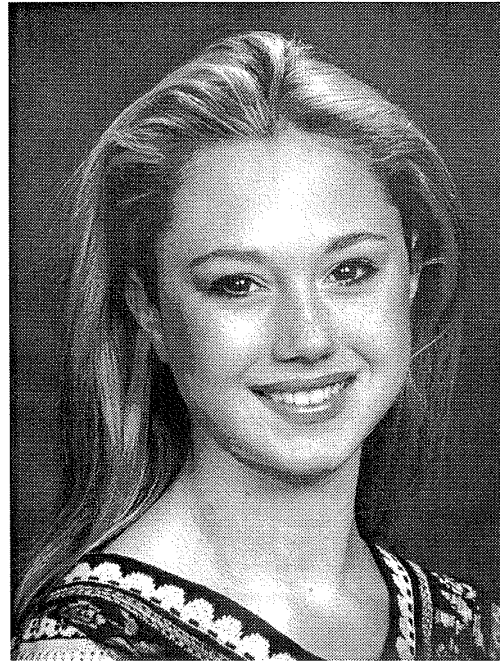
The added heartbreak for the Stoeffens was knowing that their daughter had been clean and sober for three years — but recently chose to drink "moderately" with a new group of friends, Judy Stoeffen said.

For recovering addicts, resuming any level of drinking or taking drugs can lead to lethal results, Gary Stoeffen said.

After maintaining more than 24 successful years of alcohol recovery, he should know.

Gary Stoeffen found a small flashlight inside his daughter's mangled car that fateful night. Surprisingly, when he pressed it, the light went on.

"It's the light that still shines within Lisa — the light that shines within us all," Stoeffen said. "It represents a symbol of hope amidst the



**Lisa Marie Stoeffen, above, at age 14. At left, her 1996 Mazda after the accident in which she died, and Lisa at age 4, below.**

chaos."

Now he carries it to the alcohol recovery meetings he still attends, sessions he once attended with his daughter.

Lisa's parents never knew she regressed, which literally sent them a crushing blow on Jan. 3, when she died instantly in a car wreck.

The Stoeffens will always remember someone thumping on their front door, waking them from a sound sleep. Instinctively they knew it would be bad news.

Judy Stoeffen recalls hearing piercing screams — her own — filling those quiet morning hours of Jan. 3. Det. Dan Wall with the San Diego Police Department's traffic division along with a medical examiner came directly from the accident to their front door.

And Wall will tell you that delivering that kind of message "is the most heartbreaking part of my job."

Wall can't forget the mangled car, a partially opened case of beer and the young driver — Lisa Marie Stoeffen — who was pronounced dead at the scene.

In the following six weeks, Wall kept in touch with the family, as they waited for toxicology results.

For the girl's family, it was difficult to hear that her great strides to stop drinking had failed.

And for a family so in touch with drug and alcohol prevention, the grief was overwhelming — but they vowed to speak out, especially about adults serving alcohol to minors, because that's where Lisa's battle really began.

Lisa had her first drink at 14, when she went

to a friend's home where parents let teens drink. From then, it was a roller-coaster ride in fighting addiction, including three different recovery programs.

"Adults shouldn't be giving kids alcohol," Judy Stoeffen said. "Alcohol is a drug, not a beverage,"

But generally, society thinks it's OK to drink, she said.

"People say 'but it's not drugs,' like it should be a normal rite of passage for teens," Stoeffen said. "Our daughter's first counselor told us 'she's just experimenting.'"

The Stoeffens knew better — because of their family's history of addiction — which prompted them to search for a counselor with experience in treating teen addicts.

Lisa attended several programs, ultimately finding a niche with a 12-step program she and her dad participated in together.

At Lisa's Light, which is still growing, families can find links to recovery programs and helpful tips about recognizing the signs of drug and alcohol use in their teens.

Part of prevention starts with recognizing some basic symptoms, the Stoeffens suggest.

"If your child has gone from straight As to flunking, becomes verbally abusive with family and friends, forgets about being goal oriented and just wants to have fun, you're looking at the warning signs," Judy Stoeffen said.

"Get involved, get help — right away."

*Gary Stoeffen read this poem at his daughter's memorial earlier this year . . .*

**Miss Me, But Let Me Go**

When I come to the end of the road  
And the sun has set for me,  
I want no rites in a gloom-filled room,  
Why cry for a soul set free?  
Miss me a little - but not too long,  
And not with your head bowed low,  
Remember the love that we once shared,  
Miss me - but let me go.  
For this is a journey that we all must take,  
And each must go alone,  
It's all a part of the Master's plan,  
A step on the road to home.  
When you are lonely and sick of heart,  
Go to the friends we know,  
And bury your sorrows in doing good deeds,  
Miss me - but let me go."

