

# Shannon's Story

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If you or someone you know is a victim or survivor and needs help, please reach out to us, we are here 24-hours a day.

**THIS STORY CONTAINS IMAGES AND DESCRIPTIONS OF ABUSE THAT CAN BE TRIGGERING.**



Shannon was magical. She found her way into the heart of everything good. She was the “centerpiece” of her family, born the third of six siblings, and often surrounded by friends. She was confident and very smart. She was beautiful and fun, with an infectious laugh. According to her

parents — Donna and Rudy — Shannon seemed to “live life with roller-skates on.” The stories and images of Shannon that they share outline the shape of her magic. When looking at pictures of her, it is easy to imagine her animated — she almost appears to be moving in the still shots. Her style is colorful. She looks directly at the camera; her eyes are bright. You get a sense of her energy from accounts of her work in the pediatrician’s practice where she was a patient before being hired. Shannon — explains her younger sister, Simone — was able to calm young patients who were afraid of a test or a needle. She danced for and joked with kids and colleagues — sharing joy and putting folks at ease — just as she had as a child when she looked out for her younger siblings and neighbors. Shannon’s family describes her dedication to her two young sons, how she loved to watch them try new things. She modeled fearlessness for them as she dreamed big dreams for herself and her family. She didn’t miss anything that was important to her boys while she moved closer toward those dreams — whether it was a baseball or soccer game, or a nightly bedtime routine. Shannon turned to coursework for her master’s degree after they went to sleep before she woke up early the next morning to drop them off at her parent’s house on her way to work.



The boys were still wearing their pajamas when they were dropped off at Donna and Rudy’s house a few hours after their mother was murdered. Donna remembers grabbing for them as they walked through the same front door that the sergeant had entered a couple of hours before. After her son Jordan let him inside, the sergeant stood near the door — at the bottom of the staircase — patiently waiting as

Donna slid down each step slowly toward him. She was recovering from an achilles repair surgery and couldn’t walk. She knew, as she struggled to descend, that he and the other officer who accompanied him would tell them that someone had passed away. It felt cruel that she had to work so hard to get to them and the news that they brought. When the sergeant told the family that Shannon had been murdered at the hands of her boyfriend and the father of her youngest son, Donna remembers screaming “with every bit of breath” that was in her body. She screamed, she says, for the whole world to hear.

Even when whole worlds are turned upside down, there are ordinary things that eventually must happen in them. Donna remembers thinking — after the scream, after she and Rudy and Simone and Jordan held each other tightly while they slowly caught their breath, after the knock at the door telling them that the boys had arrived — that her grandsons would need to get dressed the next day. When Child Protective Services left the house that night, Donna struggled to close her eyes and rest. She worried that there were no clothes for the boys to change into when they woke up to a world without their mother.

On the morning after Shannon was murdered, staff from Center for Safety & Change showed up at Donna and Rudy’s front door. They brought clothes for the boys and food. Donna remembers clearly the way that a social worker, Jean, stepped forward and embraced them, asking what the Center could do to help. Donna knew that the kids needed clothes. She wasn’t sure what to do after they were dressed. Grief and shock can sometimes feel paralyzing.

Though it hadn’t occurred to them to be hungry, they ate. Center staff invited the family to their office to think through their next steps together. With the family’s permission, a child therapist talked to the boys about what had happened to their mother. Donna and Rudy were grateful to not have to try to find the right words alone. In the hours and days that followed Shannon’s murder, Center for Safety & Change anticipated and met many ordinary and extraordinary needs of her family.

The practical matters of dealing with loss and the effects of grief are complicated and enduring. To the bereaved, it can sometimes feel like the world has moved on without them. While the initial response from those in their community and beyond was

strong — immense and full of love — in the months after Shannon’s murder, the volume of calls and visits and meals from others diminished slowly. [Center for Safety & Change continued to show up for her family with welcome support.](#) The boys were placed in the legal care of Donna and Rudy. When they moved to a new home that would allow the boys to have their own bedrooms and an outdoor space to play, the Center paid for movers, brought supplies to the family, and even helped to pack and move boxes. For each holiday and birthday in the months after their loss, the Center made sure that the boys had what they needed to feel celebrated. [As the family prepared for the trial of Shannon’s murderer, the Center again offered support to the family.](#) The months anticipating and going through the trial were deeply painful for Shannon’s family as they visited and revisited the events that led to her murder. Shannon’s five siblings were present in court each day. Their testimony was brave and essential to the case, which resulted in a conviction. Later that year, when Simone’s son was born prematurely, the Center also showed up to offer support while he was in the NICU and eventually transitioned home. Through these difficult times, Donna cried with Jean so that she “didn’t need to cry in front of her children or grandchildren.” She felt that the Center picked her and Rudy up so that they could pick up others in their family who needed help.

As they talk about their daughter, about how much they miss Shannon, Donna and Rudy assert that “grief is long.” During a recent call, Jean told them, as she has before, that “the Center is with them for life.” The Center staff understands that



grief is ongoing — it returns in waves, it tremors. [Loss is felt in quakes.](#) They understand that the impact of violence and loss ripples far beyond direct victims and specific times. The Center recognizes the significance of small gestures of support. Through the years, they have consistently reached out with these gestures in the forms of financial and therapeutic support, legal counsel, birthday and holiday gifts, and calls checking in on the family. Importantly, the Center



makes it clear that they have not — and will never — forget about Shannon.

Shannon would have turned forty this July. She has been gone for nearly a decade.

Before her life was cut short, Shannon had big plans. She wanted to move to Virginia and to continue building her career with the master’s degree that she completed in medical administration. She wanted to travel. Donna and Rudy moved to Virginia a few years ago; it was important to them that the boys live where their mother planned to settle. The family explains that a picture of Shannon, in a bright outfit with a huge smile, hangs in the pediatrician’s office where she worked. When Donna and Rudy visit the practice on their trips to New York, patients and colleagues still recall their daughter’s laugh and kindness. At Shannon’s high school, a scholarship has been established and awarded in her name, given each year to a student committed to their future. Shannon’s oldest son will apply to PhD programs when he graduates from Virginia Tech this year, and her younger son is making plans for after his high school graduation in June. The boys



look forward to seeing new places. [Their family knows that they are getting ready to soar.](#) Donna hears Shannon’s voice sometimes in things that they say. She sees how they serve as role models for their younger cousin who watches them dream and work. When the boys — now young men — talk about missing their mother, Donna tells them that their mother grew in her, so when they look at her, “they are also seeing their mama.” Some days, she wears Shannon’s perfume, smelling her daughter on her wrist and in the fabric of her clothes when she inhales, moving through the world. “Shannon lives on through us,” Simone says, “she is guiding us as we move forward.”

Shannon’s family will gather together at the cemetery where she is buried on her birthday this year as they do every year, with cupcakes, to celebrate. They will sit around and alongside her gravestone, with Shannon at the center. The family will read the birthday cards that they bring to her.

[They will remember her life, not her passing.](#) They will recall her energy, her dreams, her talents, her style, and the profound love that she gave to her sons and showed all of her family and friends. Shannon’s family will reflect on how she lives through them. They will see how they continue to grow around the shape of her magic. They will honor her again and again and always.

