

# Overcoming Tragedy

Tony and Cassi Bellezza

**I**N LIFE, WE OFTEN FIND OURSELVES facing unexpected challenges that push us to our limits. For our family, the loss of our beloved son, Anthony, who battled with ADHD and other learning difficulties, became the driving force behind our vision to make a positive impact on the lives of countless children and teenagers facing similar challenges. This is the story of how we turned our family tragedy into a powerful vision to provide holistic care and support for kids with ADHD.

## **A heartfelt beginning**

Anthony was a special young boy with a heart of gold. He was sensitive, kind, and had an infectious sense of humor. Despite his struggles with ADHD, he always wore a smile and cared deeply for others. He loved his three sisters, Meredith, Aubrey, and Gabriella, and they adored him, though his youthful impulsiveness sometimes led to irritation. As time passed and he matured, their bond and relationship deepened, bringing joy to our family.

Anthony's unwavering kindness was evident in how he befriended every new student at school. He despised seeing anyone sad and never wished harm upon anyone. He became sad when he thought someone was his friend, then they would stop with no explanation.

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark curly hair, wearing a light-colored sweater, holding a lit sparkler. The scene is set at night, with the background being dark and the light from the sparkler illuminating her face and hands. The sparkler is bright and glowing, with many sparks flying out. The overall mood is warm and celebratory.

A Story of  
Love, Kindness,  
and Making a  
Difference

## Facing challenges and discovering strengths

Although Anthony was a bright soul, school posed challenges for him. His second-grade teacher recognized his struggle and reached out to us. It was during an assignment that Anthony's frustration peaked, leading him to crumple the paper and express his feelings of self-hate. This heartbreaking moment prompted us to seek help.

A trip to the pediatrician set us on a path of understanding. He was very helpful and started a school and home evaluation and requested a psychiatric evaluation. Anthony's diagnosis of ADHD and dysgraphia, along with deficits in math and reading, shed light on his difficulties. The pediatrician directed the evaluating psychiatrist to prepare a 504 Plan. Armed with a 504 Plan, we collaborated with the school to provide the support he needed.

The challenges mounted in school, including bullying from supposed friends. This made Anthony sad and frustrated. We then found solace in a specialized psychiatrist known for working with children with ADHD. The psychiatrist suggested a first series of ADHD medication. Since his dad was not sure about using medications, we discussed this with Anthony's pediatrician. He told us that we could medicate him now, or most likely when he becomes a teenager, he will seek out alternatives to help him such as alcohol or drugs.

The medication proved to work and helped Anthony during the school days. We found a supportive retired schoolteacher to help with Anthony's school assignments and education. She was a blessing, as she had ADHD and understood how to help Anthony to be successful.

Amidst the struggles, Anthony's unique talents emerged. His captivating voice and dedication to martial arts showcased his abilities. Earning a black belt at the age of twelve boosted his confidence, enabling him to stand up against bullies and protect fellow students that were being bullied.

He loved to sing with his mom, so for one of her birthdays, he asked his dad if he would take him to a recording studio. He recorded the Bruno Mars song *Just the Way You Are* for his mom—it was a special birthday gift!

Anthony's true passion lay in cars and motorcycles. With his father's guidance, help, and resources, Anthony transformed a beat-up red 1989 BMW 325i car into a



stunning vehicle. He planned to use it for his senior prom. Today, this BMW is garage kept and the family plans to enter it into car shows.

## An impulsive act leads to heartbreak

Anthony had everything going for him and he was at a high point in his life looking forward to the future as he turned eighteen. His love for cars helped to get

him accepted into Northwood University to major in automotive marketing and management. He was so excited, as he thought he would never get into college.

Anthony's journey was marked by triumphs and challenges, but impulsivity remained a significant hurdle. His tendency to act without considering consequences led to issues. In high school he started dating, and he had two relationships. His second relationship was emotionally turbulent. Despite our attempts to guide him away from this emotional relationship, he persisted, eventually leading to a devastating outcome.

At the age of eighteen, Anthony's impulsive decision resulted in his tragic death on April 4, 2016. While the police and the coroner declared it was death by suicide, our personal investigation shed light that it was an accident spurred by his impulsiveness. He was not depressed. It was late at night; he was off his medication, and he was not thinking about the consequences of this action.

At his memorial service, countless students, friends, and family members shared stories of his kindness and

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the positive impact he had on their lives. Their words offered us comfort in the midst of our grief.

**From grief to a purposeful path**

The loss of Anthony shattered our world. The death of a child is every parent's worst fear, and it was no different for us. For the first six months, we were in a fog, not understanding how this could happen. With the help of a psychiatrist, we navigated our grief, and with his help we recognized that we were grieving differently. This acknowledgment helped us so we could avoid anger and arguments. Accepting the event's irreversibility was a pivotal moment, forcing us to choose between succumbing to despair or channeling our pain into positive change. We chose the latter.

Vowing to honor Anthony's memory, we spent years preparing to make a difference. From our personal experience, extensive research, and diving into numerous articles and books written by top experts such as Russell Barkley, PhD, and Edward Hallowell, MD, we recognized the need for a comprehensive, holistic care approach. We knew it would take a coalition of dedicated professionals and experts to bring change—we were ready to confront these conditions head-on.

**A transformative holistic care model with top experts**

At the heart of our belief was that a hands-on holistic approach to care was essential. The model had to be aimed at addressing medical, emotional, and social aspects while nurturing children and teenagers in an environment of acceptance and growth.

Our vision was realized by assembling a team of partners in the following fields:

- Top experts in the medical/psychiatric arena
- The best certified ADHD life coaches
- Student advocates who understand how to work through the school system to get a student what is needed for them to be successful
- Educational tutors in English, math, and the languages
- Health coaches and fitness experts that know what works to help raise dopamine levels,
- College preparation resources for help with SAT, ACT, and college admissions

This team of partners will be united with shared goals: to foster resilience; create a positive supportive environment; self-discovery; and growth.

**Kindness as a core value**

Central to our approach is the power of kindness. We believe that bringing kindness into the equation will help these children and teenagers feel more connected and have less stress. We incorporated a kindness program into our holistic care model to keep Anthony's kind, loving spirit alive. Our partners will encourage these kids to think about acts of kindness that will enhance their communities. Kind deeds will be celebrated, promoting connection, self-esteem, and overall community engagement. Kindness scholarships will be established to recognize

students who went above and beyond, spreading kindness in their communities. This kindness core value will raise kindness to a whole new level across the country.

**A beacon of hope for generations**

Our journey from grief to purpose showcases the potential for healing and transformation even in

the darkest times. Through our holistic care model and unwavering commitment, we aspire to provide a pathway of hope for kids with ADHD and mental health struggles.

Anthony's spirit lives on in every life we will touch, his legacy of kindness and positivity guiding us forward. In the end, our family motto has and always will encapsulate our outlook: *"Today is the best day of my (our) life, and tomorrow will be even better!"* 🙏



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**Tony and Cassi Bellezza** are the founders of Anthony's Way—The Road to Kindness. Learn more about their holistic transformational care model and kindness program at <http://www.anthonysroadtokindness.com>.