

Helen the Hugger: How Helen Corontzes' Legacy Lives On

Jasmine Bryson, *Contributor*

Helen Corontzes was without a doubt a hugger. Add that to the long list of other things that she also was: caring, loving, and thoughtful just to name a few. Helen's legacy can be felt through the foundation named after her, Helen's Hugs which gives children the opportunity to bond with horses.

Helen's mother, Lesa Corontzes, describes Helen as "the kind of person when you saw her, any time you ran into her, you always got a hug from her. If you greeted her, you got a hug. It was just the most sincere thing. It was just the way she was. An it's kind of inspired me to be more of a hugger because it came so natural to her. It would be, she might hug you 10 times, but you were going to get a hug from Helen no matter what, and that's how we came up with the name."

Helen Corontzes was involved in a car accident in March 2006 with her family when they were stopped at a traffic light and a car speeding from behind at 70 miles per hour hit them. The driver had fallen asleep at the wheel. George Corontzes, Helen's father, recalls on that fateful night, "We got slammed from behind, no one knew what happened. We got pushed through the big intersection, luckily nothing hit us that way. All of a sudden you've got ambulances piling in, a helicopter, so Helen gets airlifted to McCloud hospital in Florence which is a highly acclaimed brain trauma hospital. It's a great hospital period, but their brain trauma is supposed to be one of the best in the nation..." George Corontzes also recalls that his other daughter "Christine goes one way in an ambulance to the Conway hospital, Helen goes another way to Florence by air and we're in the intersection with police taking us where we need to go and that was all just a crazy blur." However, there were no criminal charges and no lawsuit for the suspect who hit them.

To preserve Helen's positive spirit, her friends and their families began Helen's Hugs. With the help of generous donations and contributions and keen volunteers has financed thousands of equestrian therapy lessons for people in need such as special needs children whose families may not have be able to afford them. Helen "was an accomplished equestrian," says her father. "We wanted to do something that Helen would love involving special needs children and horses." Helen's Hugs also sponsors a 5k run/walk for raising money. George also notes that "We have a run/walk, and it's also a hangout. Hangout being, there's fun and food, and it's free, and there's a bake sale. And there's activities for kids. Music. We change the music, but we have a DJ this year. It's really a 5k run/walk and hangout. We encourage people to stay after the run and have a good time."

Helen gave blood regularly, was a nursing student, and always offered a helping hand to others. She volunteered for children and nursing homes. Helen donated her heart to a 14-year-old boy named Josh, her kidney and pancreas to Laura, a young, diabetic mother, and numerous other organs to other people in need. Through organ donning in Helen's Hugs, Helen's legacy lives on and is preserved.

To donate to Helen's Hugs, you can visit the Helen's Hugs website and click "donate" at the top of the page and pay with a credit or debit card.

Lesa Corontzes remembers her daughter, Helen, as "simply beautiful inside and out."