

Mother turns family's trauma into podcast

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When her son, Archer, was seriously injured in a diving accident in 2015, Louise Phipps Senft filled the time waiting on his progress with journal entries, texts and emails to update family and friends about the 17-year-old.

Five years to the day of the accident, Senft, a Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parishioner, launched a podcast, *Blink of an Eye* (BlinkOfAnEyePodcast.com) Aug. 4. Weekly episodes based on her notes are designed to help others facing traumatic crises.

Using memories, interviews and messages of hope and faith, her podcasts address issues ranging from what to say or text, when to share the truth, and the value of prayer.

"If it captures the heart of people, they'll listen and tell others," said Senft, an attorney who runs Baltimore Mediation with her husband, Deacon William Senft. "They're not alone. God's always with them."

Surrounded by her husband, who

serves on the cathedral staff, and four other children, she wrote daily while Archer was treated for a broken neck and paralysis in an Atlantic City hospital.

Archer, 22, has regained the use of his neck and the top of his shoulder. He is a senior at the University of Pennsylvania, majoring in computer science, studying online from the family's Roland Park home because of the pandemic.

He and his younger brother, Dutch, collaborate in a Hampden art studio on a series of prints and a T-shirt for their website, slimeyard.com. According to his mother, Archer asked not to be involved in the podcast, but told his mother it was OK, "As long as you make it your story and not mine."

For a year, her updates – written on her phone and sent to family members – were posted on several Facebook pages, including her own and Prayers for Archer, set up by Senft's old high school, Sacred Heart Academy in Springfield, Ill. People would stop her at the supermarket, expressing concern.

Her followers shared their own experiences, of a child's death, academic hurdles or troubled relationships. Some reported returning to their faith after reading her posts.

When Senft considered writing a book, her husband collected every note or text he could find, enough entries to fill a 1,089-page book. Reading the notes, she said, "Was just too much for me. It upset me." A friend urged her to share the story, which, Senft said,



Louise Phipps Senft

"Really moved me."

At Thanksgiving 2019, her husband suggested she read it aloud, "like manna from heaven," she said. She poured new energy into an audiobook, which became the podcast. In a radio writing class, she wrote her first episode. "I didn't know if I could," she said.

Deacon Senft hasn't listened to the podcast, but supports her efforts.

"I lived it," he said. "She believes it's all to help other people with their own traumatic events. I try to help her with whatever she might need to make it happen."

With daily Mass impossible because of the pandemic, she "fervently" turned to private prayer.

New episodes are posted every Tuesday, weaving in memories and messages of support, compassion and faith. Senft expects to feature stories of others who have survived similar experiences, highlighting their resilience and epiphanies.

Christine Bergmark of Leonardtown met Senft at one of her mediation workshops. When she heard about the podcast project, she volunteered to help.

"It has been a fascinating journey," said Bergmark, who transcribes interviews and helps with scripts for each episode. Not only is she learning Archer's story, she has benefited from the podcasts' messages.

"It's really the story of hope and healing and advocacy," she said. "You're never alone. That's the message for me." ●



Louise Phipps Senft records her podcast "Blink of an Eye," which chronicles her family's journey from tragedy to epiphany following her son Archer's 2015 swimming accident during a vacation in New Jersey, which left him a quadriplegic.