

SPEAKUP STORIES

THE COMMUNITY SPEAKS UP

JEN AND PAUL CROSTEN SPEAKS UP



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When Paul and I were asked if we would share why we became involved with Cameron's cause, I knew it would be more complicated than it first appeared. Let me state for the record and as a measure of full disclosure that I am almost 53 years old, and my husband and partner in crime for more than 30 years is 54. We have four children, and we both have stressful careers that demand attention. I shared our ages because our experiences are probably relatable to many of our generation.

As a teenager in the 70's and 80's, I watched both my grandmother and mother struggle with anxiety, depression and poor self-esteem. As a young person myself, I struggled with anxiety, unexplained sadness and profound confidence issues. In my husband's family, the accepted "remedy" or coping mechanism was alcohol. For members of our generation, depression and mental illness were topics spoken of in whispers. If you were 'blue' or melancholy, you were expected to pull yourself up by your bootstraps and get on with it. There was not an awareness, understanding or network of support and guidance.

As parents, Paul and I were excited to watch our children grow and flourish. Every parent's dream is for their children to love life, be happy and successful, so we were quite unprepared for one of our children to struggle profoundly with depression his first year in college. We knew something was wrong with our normally happy, easy going child. And when this high school 4.0+ student was not asked back for his sophomore year at college, we were confused and upset, and made numerous attempts to find the reason for the change in his behavior and outlook on life. Looking back, we were unprepared to solve this alone given our old school thinking. We entered one of the darkest times as a family. I am happy and grateful to say, we have come out the other side of this wormhole complete and infinitely more aware.

I said at the top that Paul and I both have busy careers. My business happens to employ a large quantity of teens and twenty somethings. I have seen firsthand and up close, their many struggles with anxiety, depression and body image issues. I have watched them try to find their own solutions to fix the way they feel - from drug and alcohol abuse, to self-harm, to attempts to take their own lives. So many of them feel isolated and alone, so alone, in their misery.

There are many righteous causes in this world that demand our attention. We join the fight against breast cancer, heart disease, ALS. We march for equality and against oppression. Each of these is a worthy recipient of our time, efforts and financial contributions, to be sure. What do these causes have in common that lead to such a visible, quantifiable amount of support? Let me answer. There is no silence or shame surrounding them.

A worthy cause also needs passionate champions. Mental illness is shrouded in mystery, misunderstanding and quiet suffering. What Grace and David have done in championing Cameron's cause shines a light into the darkness, a soft, welcoming light that is warm and comforting. It places no blame and carries no judgment. The work of the CKG Foundation is a loving effort that brings not only a toolbox for the hard work to be done, but hope. Great big hope. Hope that this next minute can be better than the last, and that tomorrow may just be the best day ever, if we let it come.

And that is why Paul and I became involved. We are moved to want to be a part of helping our young people get to tomorrow, to providing this generation, their parents and educators, with the information to help them fight and give them tools to cope. To let tomorrow come.



[Cameron K. Gallagher Foundation](http://www.cameronkgallagherfoundation.org)