



# blessing in tragedy

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**A**s the class of 2013 eagerly anticipates their senior year at Houghton and their turn to don cap and gown next year, one young woman will not be graduating alongside her classmates as planned.

May 2013 marks the intended graduation of Christine Besaw, who died four years ago from traumatic injuries sustained in a tragic car accident before she could attend her chosen college.

When Gary and Cindy Besaw of Rutland County, Vermont, first investigated Houghton College for their daughter, Chris was not enthusiastic at the idea. Then, during a campus visit in April of 2008, she met [Susan \(Gurney '81\) Martin](#), assistant professor for education, who recognized Chris's lack of interest and encouraged the high school junior to go wherever God led, even if it wasn't Houghton.

"I think Chris was kind of blown away by that attitude," Gary recalls. That same day, Chris surprised her family by announcing she would be attending Houghton College and made the decision public by updating her Facebook profile to include a picture of herself wearing a Houghton College t-shirt.

Less than a month later, on May 18, 2008, the Besaw family suffered the loss of their daughter. The days that followed the accident were trying as they sought God's plan amid their grief. "Make no mistake about it...there has been much pain and frustration," said Gary in a book he would later write about Chris's life. "However, one

thing [was] clear to each of us: God works through pain, suffering, struggles, and joy to bring about the best for His bride."

The Besaw family chose to host a celebration in honor of their daughter's life. A few days prior to the celebration, the family received a standard admission mailing from Houghton College. Gary sent an email to all of the colleges Chris had considered, explaining the accident and requesting they be removed from mailing lists.

The family was surprised when they received a personal e-mail from [Ryan Spear '07](#), associate director of admission, extending his sympathies and assuring them their request would be honored. In addition, Ryan attached an e-mail Chris had sent to Professor Martin in her excitement about wanting to attend Houghton:

*I just wanted to say thank you so much for meeting with me on Thursday. To be honest, I went to Houghton not really interested in the college, but after going there and meeting with you I absolutely love it. The education program at Houghton sounds wonderful and I would definitely be thrilled to be a part of it. I have a very difficult decision ahead of me but I know God will direct me. So thank you for taking time out of your day to meet with me. And maybe someday I will be able to call you professor. :)*

A few days later, the Besaw family received a box of Chris's favorite flowers, white day lilies, from the admission office at Houghton. "I think it was about that time that Cindy and I decided that we would certainly try to do something nice for Houghton one day," remembers Gary, surprised at the thoughtful gift.



**CHRISTINE BESAW**, publicly announcing her intent to attend Houghton in fall 2009.

If my greatest hopes and dreams for my children are that they love the Lord, live for Christ and influence others for God, then did my hopes and dreams for Chris really come to an end?

“They truly demonstrated that they are a Christian college in more ways than we could have imagined.”

Over the next months, the Besaw family witnessed how Chris’s death was impacting their community as people came together to remember and reflect on Chris’s life and seek God as a result of her testimony. During this time of healing, Gary and Cindy made the decision to bless Houghton in memory of their daughter.

“What impressed me about Gary and Cindy was their seemingly immediate desire to bless others in the face of their tragedy,” remembers Ryan. “It is tempting to try to boil the events of Christine’s life and death down to a simple Sunday school lesson of ‘everything happens for a reason.’ I think it is closer to the truth to admit that things happen in life

that don’t make sense – that are heartbreaking and soul-wrenching – but that, in spite of these experiences, God still works and speaks and seeks the good of His children.”

Working with staff from Houghton, Gary and Cindy set up the Christine Besaw Endowed Scholarship which would be awarded to a student planning on pursuing Chris’s intended major, English secondary education. This scholarship was originally meant for one student but was generously expanded to include up to four; providentially, this gift has helped one of Chris’s best friends to attend Houghton.

“I was reminded of something very important,” writes Gary in the last pages of Chris’s story. “If my greatest hopes and dreams for my children are that they love the Lord, live for Christ and influence others for God, then did my hopes and dreams for Chris really come to an end? Chris loved the Lord, she lived her life to the fullest...even today I hear accounts of someone who has had his or her life changed by interaction with Chris or by the events of May 18th.”

It’s been four years since Chris’s passing, and while she isn’t calling Susan Martin professor or excitedly planning her senior year alongside friends, Chris has left a mark upon Houghton College. While the junior class looks to the future, Chris’s story brings to light the precious gift of the present. ||||

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*Gary Besaw’s book detailing Christine’s story, *A Peanut Learns to Dance: How One Girl’s Tragedy Transformed the Christian Community*, is slated to be published this fall.*