

# Going the extra mile

Lisa Eades turned personal tragedy into positive work for others

**"T**he people at Jason's Friends Foundation are really nice. They helped us when I was sick," said 10-year-old Clayton Loraas, who was diagnosed with leukemia at age 2.

It's in remission now.

Though he may not understand the full scope of his disease, he knows from his mother, Karel Loraas, how Jason's Friends Foundation "saved our lives."

Said Clayton, "They helped us pay for the car, and the house, and gosh, stuff that we needed help with."

While your life is in "total upheaval, and you don't know which direction to go, Jason's Friends steps in and says, 'We're here to help,'" Karel said in an interview from her home in Casper — a home this family was fortunate to keep after months of being gone from their jobs.

"It's sad to say, but do you want to be at work the day your child dies and not have had that time with him?" questioned Karel.

Jason's Friends Foundation, whose president Lisa Eades is intimately familiar with the emotional and financial burdens associated with childhood cancer, has assisted more than 100 families similar to the Loraases.

## In Jason's memory

Eades had a nearly perfect life, living in her dream home, balancing an exciting career with motherhood — until her son, Jason, was diagnosed with cancer in January 1995.

He died 11 months later at age 9.

"When a child dies, it's huge," she said. "There's so much pain. Nothing functions the same."

Eades wondered if she'd ever again



Lisa Eades sits with a statue of her son, Jason, outside of Park School.  
Photo by Robin Beaver

appreciate what life had to offer. But ultimately, she turned a grieving heart into one of hope for others whose children have cancer-related illnesses.

Eades, along with friends Tisa Bilek and Jeri Durdahl, established Jason's Friends Foundation in 1996 after discussing what they could do for other families whose children have cancer.

Initially, it was simply delivering meals. But they quickly realized that while emotional support is important, the financial impact strikes an immediate blow. That initiated the fund-raising piece of the foundation.

Eades' involvement was minimal at first. "But they knew at some point I'd get strong enough and they'd reel me in — that I'd embrace it and run with it," she said.

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Bilek describes Eades as tenacious, saying, "She's a doer. Nothing is ever 50 percent."

Not even a cause like Jason's Friends, which keeps Eades in the thick of often tragic, cancer-related reminders.

Karel said, "I feel bad for the ones just starting through it, because you

know the road they'll go down. I admire Lisa, because day to day, she stays on that road. She knows what the worst end of it is. She didn't get off and say, 'I've had it.'"

Eades has always gone the extra mile.

"I work hard at everything I do," she said.

It's her husband, Rocky, and his financial success, she added, that allow her to devote time and energy to Jason's Friends.

Certain events in Eades' life were pivotal in helping her today, as a business-

woman, running an organization such as Jason's Friends.

From the start, Eades' parents were good role models with high expectations, she said. And she believes it was her experience on her high school debate team that laid a good foundation in her careers in marketing, advertising and sales.

"It's been valuable my entire life — it's one of the more profound things I ever did. It forces you to think fast on your feet and be comfortable with public speaking," Eades added.

And it shows. Eades easily approaches any audience about the benefits of Jason's Friends. She had the confidence recently to present a major cancer control plan to the state Senate and the House.

At the fore, however, is her desire to continue being a good mom to daughters Brooke and Skylar — and still to Jason, who as a boy said he wanted to someday be famous.

"It isn't what I had in mind for him, but he's still reaching out, helping others as he did in life," said Eades.

"His death has defined, now, my life."

By ROBIN BEAVER