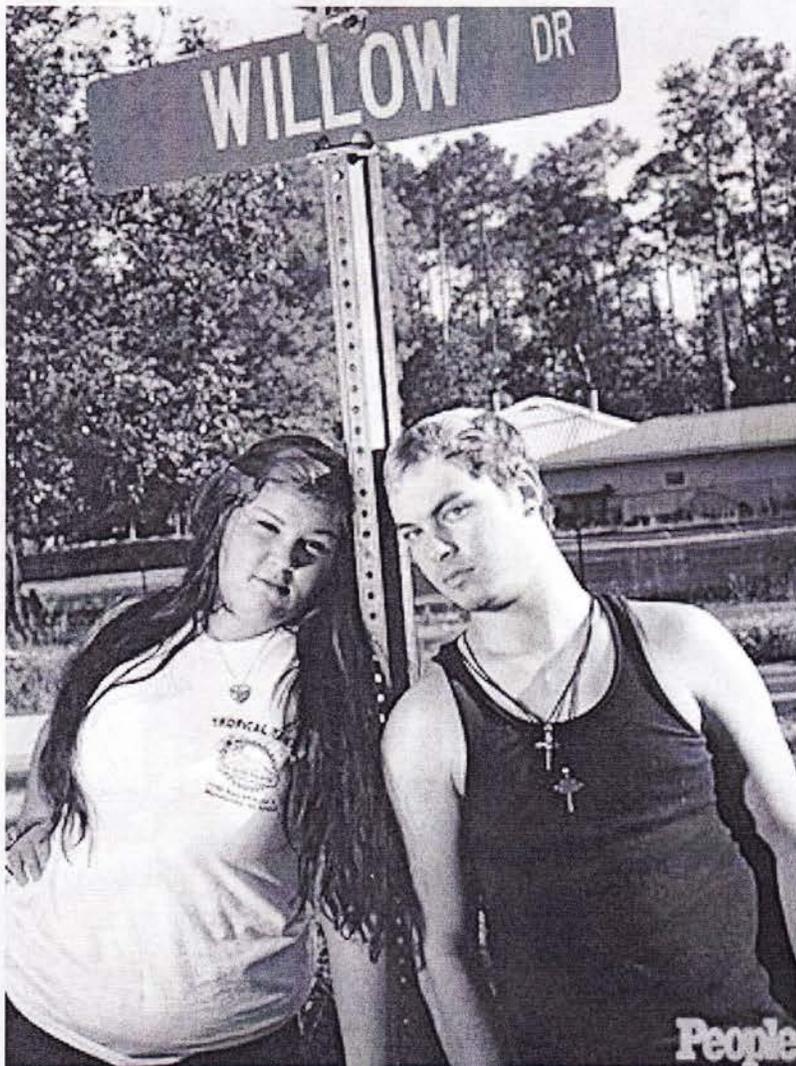


Tyler and Cheyenne Osburn Find Support from Neighbors After Mom's Death

By ANNE LANG AND NICOLE WEISENSEE EGAN
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Cheyenne and Tyler Osburn

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Two orphans in the small, working-class town of Lacombe, La., have found that family doesn't only have to be biological – even strangers can reach out and take care of each other.

Teenagers Tyler and Cheyenne Osburn learned early in life about hardship: their father, Billy, a guitar player in a rock band, died when they were infants. Their mother, Liz, a hairdresser, was badly injured while burning trash in their backyard in 2007 and permanently disabled. When she died of a heart attack two weeks before Christmas 2011, Tyler was 18 and a senior in high school, and Cheyenne was 16 and a junior.

"I was so scared of not having a mom, having no one to come home to, having to deal with grown-up things like bills," says Cheyenne. "I felt so alone."

But she and her brother soon discovered they weren't alone. In a town of approximately 8,000, friends, neighbors and strangers reached out to help the Osburn kids survive and stay in the only home they'd ever known.

Their mom's friends Gwen Babin and Karen Labatut agreed to be the children's legal guardians and started a rotation with family friend Pam Taylor, taking turns cooking dinner and staying overnight at the teens' home. A men's Bible study group mowed their lawn. A local pizza business donated meals. And Jackie Dantin, head of the local nonprofit [Community Christian Concern Inc.](#) set up a fund to help pay their monthly mortgage, groceries and other bills through this summer.

"The timing [of Liz's death] made it especially sad, because it was Christmas and their father had died at the same time of year," says Dantin. "And these were teenagers, good teenagers, left alone with responsibilities they could not begin to understand."

Some Worries Still Exist

The community's efforts have ensured both kids were able to be cared for in their home and live together throughout high school.

"I am very proud of the people of our community," says Dantin. "People gave of their money and of their time. It was truly a community effort, one that gave two orphaned kids a little bit better chance in life. And we met our goal, Cheyenne has graduated and is planning to attend college. Being able to stay in her home means everything to her."

Tyler, now 19, is working in construction, and Cheyenne, now 17, who earned As and Bs throughout high school, will start college classes nearby – and say they feel blessed to have the support of their town.

They still worry about how they will continue to make ends meet and if they will be able to remain in their home, but Tyler says he will do everything he can to make sure they do.

"I think about [my mom] every single day," says Tyler. "After she passed away, I felt really lost. My sister gives me hope. It's my instinct to protect her. I'm going to be there for her no matter what."

Cheyenne says that her high school classmates were supportive of her plight, though they couldn't relate to what it was like to be without parents.

"I never thought all these people would want to help so much," she says. "It's been amazing."