

Pasadena family pulled through tragedy by school

Bob Majchrzak walked through the front door of his Pasadena home reeling from tragic loss.

“What do I do with five kids?” he muttered aloud. “What am I going to do?”

It was the summer of 2003, and Mr. Majchrzak had just watched the final hours of his wife Jennifer’s life tick away at a local hospital after a failed gall bladder surgery.

The faces of the couple’s children – Allyson, Lauryn, Zachary and twins Meagan and Justine – were a stark reminder of the challenge that lay ahead.

“I was devastated,” Mr. Majchrzak, 38, said. “Jennifer and I were inseparable. I still refer to her as my wife. She’ll always probably be that.”

The couple had a dream of sending their young children to the hometown school he attended, St. Jane Frances

Even without Jennifer, Mr. Majchrzak was sticking to the plan.

“Regardless of what it costs, I’m going to do what I need to do for them to go there,” he said. “I went there. I know firsthand what kind of people they have there. In my opinion, is it worth it? Yeah. It’s a shame there are certain kids who can’t go there. I couldn’t imagine them going to another school.”

The couple’s oldest child, Allyson, was entering fourth grade and relatively new to St. Jane when Jennifer died. Her siblings soon followed. The Majchrzaks pinched pennies to afford tuition, but the challenge of paying for five became daunting.

Even with aid from the school, Mr. Majchrzak’s financial sacrifices were not lost on his maturing children. They noticed fewer fishing and hunting trips for their father and more time at home.

“I know it costs a lot of money to send us there,” said Allyson, 13, who recently

graduated from St. Jane. "He could have done a lot with that money, but he wanted to send us there."

Mr. Majchrzak, who works for the National Security Administration, was overwhelmed after his wife's death, as Jennifer's mother committed suicide and his mother died in her sleep. Parents and teachers at St. Jane provided support through the family's mourning periods.

"There's no way I could thank everybody," Mr. Majchrzak said. "Looking back on it, I'm not sure I would have been able to make it if I wouldn't have had so much support. I don't know if I could have done it. It took everything in me to do it."

Jennifer's best friend, Kristen, left her job as a teacher's aide at St. Jane to become a baby sitter for the Majchrzaks.

"The first year was not only tough on the kids, it was tough on him," Kristen, 25, said of Mr. Majchrzak. "Because I was here so much, I knew their routines, their allergies, what they didn't like, how they liked to be tucked in at night. I said, 'No, the kids have been through enough.' I was going to watch them."

Mr. Majchrzak and Kristen fell in love as they worked to raise the children. They married in 2007. A sixth child, Tatum, joined the family last year.

While the couple tried to steer the children as much as possible, St. Jane provided a moral compass. He knew he made the right decision when Zachary, 9, found money during a vacation.

"He said, 'I asked Jesus and he said I should be honest,' " Mr. Majchrzak said. "He learned that from the school at an early age - the whole right from wrong. It's from the people who are teaching at the school."

Although Mr. Majchrzak continues to send his younger children to St. Jane, affording archdiocesan high schools will be a greater challenge. Allyson explored enrolling at The Catholic High School of Baltimore, but will attend a nearby public school.

"Allyson was just as sweet as can be and the father was very attentive to her needs," said Carrie Arnold, the admissions director at Catholic High. "They were just good

people.”

Wherever her education takes her, Allyson said that her Catholic school experience at St. Jane will linger.

“I learned you should forgive people how God would,” Allyson said. “I’ll always remember my friends and all my teachers. Each one of them was so helpful to my family.”