

By **Christina Tatu**
Pocono Record Writer
March 05, 2013

Editor's note:

On Feb. 20, former Effort resident Alyssa Toner met with the Pocono Record to talk about the online search she recently launched to find her birth mother.

Toner, 24, was killed early Saturday in a one-vehicle crash on Route 115 in Chestnuthill Township.

Toner and her friend, Luz Mujica, 37, of Saylorsburg, were on their way home from a friend's house when Mujica failed to negotiate a curve and drove into a tree just after midnight at Weir Lake and Doney roads.

Mujica was flown to an area hospital and Toner died at the scene, state police said.

It was because of the loving relationship Alyssa shared with her parents, Ruthanne and Terry Toner of Effort, that she became a proponent for adoption.

Although she dearly loved her parents, she always wondered about her biological family and recently turned to the Internet in hopes of finding her birth mother.

She also hoped her story would encourage others to learn more about adoption and the positive outcome it can have for children who are accepted into loving families.

"I am a very pro-life person because of this," Toner said.

To see her video, go to bit.ly/adoptvideo.

Her search for answers about her transformation from "Baby Wagner" to Alyssa Rachael Toner had few clues:

A dress for a little girl.

A sign on a hospital crib.

And a vague description passed on to family members of two 16-year-old parents who weren't ready for the responsibility of raising a child.

With those few leads, Toner recently turned to YouTube in hopes of finding her birth mother.

RELATED STORIES

Alyssa Rachael Toner

"I guess what I am trying to do is reach out, hoping this will get me closer," Toner says in the 7-minute-plus video, titled "How To Meet Your Mother."

In bold black magic-marker lettering, her story unfolds one loose-leaf sheet at a time.

"Hello there!" reads the first sheet, which, like the others, she holds in front of her face. She describes having been born in Allentown and how she never met her mother.

"I picture you with a great life, a wonderful family, and I don't want to screw that up for you," her video says. "I don't want anything from you. I just need to know you're out there somewhere."

Disappointing results

Toner's parents, Ruthanne and Terry Toner, were always open about the fact she was adopted and supported her search.

At 13, Toner went on a trip to Home Depot with her mother. They ran into the pastor who acted as a go-between the Toners and Alyssa's biological mother.

"He said, 'Wow, you look just like your (birth) mother,'" she said. "I thought, 'You mean there is someone out there who looks just like me?' In my teenage years, I became more curious about where I came from."

But legally, Toner couldn't file the court paperwork necessary to find her birth mother until she turned 18. That initial search was disappointing.

Because the adoption was closed, Toner didn't have much information on her biological family, and Toner's official inquiry didn't return any clues.

If she wanted to be found, Toner's birth mother could also file court papers. The fact that nothing turned up during that search could mean Toner's birth mother didn't want to be found, or was unsure how to register the necessary paperwork.

"It was a little heart-breaking because I had built up so much of my life around her and what she did for me," Toner said.

Life of music and love

Toner described herself as being "very blessed to have a loving family."

A gifted musician, she graduated from Notre Dame High School in East Stroudsburg in 2006, where she participated in musicals, chorus, jazz band and coffee houses. She graduated from Susquehanna University in 2010 with a bachelor's degree in English literature.

She was a pianist for Neola United Methodist Church, Believers and Friends, and sang with Pleasant Valley Choral Society. She lent her musical talents across a broad spectrum: She liked to do karaoke with friends. She played the guitar, piano, clarinet and trumpet. She played keyboard and sang in a band called The McBuffets.

Toner, who lived in Wind Gap, worked as a receptionist at a pediatrician's office. She aspired to be a teacher. Among her loves were stuffed animals, jokes and puns.

But first among her loves was Matt Serpico, to whom she was engaged and set to marry in September 2014.

'Owe you my life'

Toner was born on March 26, 1988, at Lehigh Valley Hospital. The only information given to her adoptive parents was that her birth mother was 16 and had tried to hide most of the pregnancy from her parents.

The only thing Toner had from her birth mother was a baby's dress that she planned to use as "verification" if she ever did meet the woman who gave birth to her.

"I owe my life to her, and I've come all this way," Toner said during her recent interview.

Toner hoped her experience would demonstrate the success that adoptive children can have when they are raised by loving families.

Her video notes that her biological mother might not want to be found. But Toner was unwavering in her message:

"You are the reason I am alive "» I literally owe you my life. Thank. You. Mom. And no matter what, I love you."

Toner's life will celebrated at 2 p.m. Saturday at Stroudsburg United Methodist Church, 547 Main St., Stroudsburg.

March 03, 2013



Funeral services have been announced for Alyssa Toner, the woman killed Saturday morning in a crash on Weir Lake Road in Chestnuthill Township.

Born Baby Wagner March 26, 1988; she came to her parents March 29, 1988 and was adopted as Alyssa Rachael Toner Jan. 10, 1989.

She is survived by parents: Terence and Ruthanne Toner; grandparents, Ruth and Richard Klase; aunts and uncle, Eileen Klase, Brenda Makar, Carolyn and Jeff Andreas; cousins, Lindsay and Josh Andreas and Christine Makar, and great aunts and uncle, Bea Collier, Lynn and Dick Seip.

An amazing gift for music Alyssa graduated from Notre Dame High School in East Stroudsburg in 2006 where she participated in musicals, chorus, jazz band, and coffee houses.

She was a pianist for Neola United Methodist Church, Believer's and Friends, and sang with the PV Choral Society. She graduated from Susquehanna University in 2010 with a BA in English Literature, where she sang with the University Chorale and Christmas/Spring Concerts.

She liked to do karaoke with friends. She played several instruments: the guitar, piano, clarinet, trumpet. She played keyboard and sang in a band called The McBuffets. She also sang the National Anthem for community events.

She loved animals, stuffed animals, jokes, and puns. Alyssa was engaged to be married September 2014 to Matt Serpico and was happy planning a wedding, along with planning to be a bridesmaid in her friend, Adrienne Burger's wedding in October 2013.

Faith Christian School and Pleasant Valley Schools were a part of her childhood; along with Pleasant Valley Presbyterian's Kids Club, Easter Sunday trumpet, and a commitment to join the church at a very young age. Alyssa helped her dad on handyman projects. She was Jesus to many friends that needed help, trying to make a difference in other people's lives by listening.

A Celebration of Alyssa's Life will take place at 2 p.m. Saturday, March 9 at Stroudsburg United Methodist Church, 547 Main St., Stroudsburg. There will be a time of fellowship after the service.

The family asks that people make a contribution in Alyssa's memory to a church youth group of their choice.

Arrangements by William H. Clark Funeral Home, 1003 Main Street Stroudsburg, PA 18360
www.wmhclarkfuneralhome.com

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Born Baby Wagner March 26, 1988; into our arms March 29, 1988; adopted as Alyssa Rachael Toner January 10, 1989. A gift from God for us to cherish and hold through thick and thin, through sickness and joy, left to be with her Lord Jesus on March 2, 2013.

An amazing gift for music Alyssa graduated from Notre Dame High School in East Stroudsburg in 2006 where she participated in musicals, chorus, jazz band, and coffee houses. She was a pianist for Neola United Methodist Church, Believer's and Friends, and sang with the PV Choral Society. She graduated from Susquehanna University in 2010 with a BA in English Literature, where she sang with the University Chorale and Christmas/Spring Concerts. She liked to do karaoke with friends. She played several instruments: the guitar, piano, clarinet, trumpet. She played keyboard and sang in a band called The McBuffets. She also sang the National Anthem for community events.

She loved animals, stuffed animals, jokes, and puns. Alyssa was engaged to be married September 2014 to Matt Serpico and was happy planning a wedding, along with planning to be a bridesmaid in her friend, Adrienne Burgers wedding in October 2013. Alyssa loved adventures and traveled to the Grand Canyon, San Diego, The Chesapeake Bay, The Outer Banks, Maine, and Florida.

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If you want to make a contribution in Alyssa's memory please donate to a church youth group.

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