

Victim impact statement read in court by Kelsey Kruse, Autumn Hallow's mother:

"Autumn was my blonde hair, blue eyed, deep dimpled baby. She was born 6 weeks early, although you'd never know this. She excelled in school, and had unimaginable love for her family and friends. She was always jumping everywhere, doing cartwheels, and dancing. She loved karaoke, coloring and being outside. When Autumn would hug you she would wrap her legs around you and would squeeze so tight. I specifically remember when I went to surprise her at lunch during her last school year, she was coming down the hall and when she saw me her face glowed. She ran up and jumped into my arms and wrapped her legs around me. This is a moment I hope I will never forget.

Aside from the day Autumn died, today is one of the hardest days of my life. To stand in front of the court and speak about how the selfish acts of Brett and Sarah have affected my life after they took my beautiful daughter from me is so incredibly difficult for me. I believed that one day I would watch Autumn fall in love, and she would be a mother and outlive me. I believed these things when I was more naïve about evil. So now, it 's with bittersweet love that I see many of Autumns friends living the lives they deserve to live and that she also deserved to live.

After Autumn was released to the funeral home I saw her for the first time. I walked into the room and she was laying there lifeless, and little. Her head was shaved, she had marks on her face and scalp. Under the sheet, her shoulders looked so small. I kept staring at her trying to recognize her. She did not look like the Autumn that I remember and I was convinced it was not her.

I have a lot of the same feelings after Autumn passed as I did the 7 months she was withheld from me before she passed. The feelings are just magnified. I missed her then but now I miss her more. I was confused and angry but now I'm more confused and angrier. Day after day, I mourned the loss of Autumn before she even died. I didn't know what was happening to her . I didn't understand why I couldn't talk to her or see her. I think about that last week before her death. Starving, sick, and full of pain. I wish I knew. I wish I broke into their house and saved her. I wish I could have nursed her back to health and she was still here. I think about that all the time. I live with these thoughts every day.

Autumn was so excited to be a big sister when I had my youngest daughter. Sadly she only got to meet her a couple times. Even though our house is full of pictures of Autumn my daughter will never truly know her big sister. Having lost a child, something you never think will happen to you, I am terrified of losing another one of my children because I know its possible. My son, who was also a victim of Brett and Sarah's abuse lost his best friend when Autumn was taken from us. He knows that could have happened to him and he knows some of the pain she went through. I am afraid he will grow up to be anything like his father. I hope I saved him in time to not affect his future.

The hardest part is not that my daughter is dead. It's how she died, how she suffered. Imagining how much pain she was in. Every day I wake up and I will suffer until I go to sleep thinking about this. I think losing a child is the greatest loss you can endure. I find peace knowing that my kids never have to look into the eyes of their abusers again. Autumn no longer has to feel terrified, unloved or unwanted. She is safe and she is with me again.

Hundreds of thousands of people, if not more know about what happened to Autumn but I live with it every day. I lay in bed and close my eyes and picture what she looked like days before she died. I imagine what she was thinking or how she felt. The what ifs and should have destroy me inside and the guilt weighs so much. I'm afraid I will forget the way her voice sounded when she would say "mom" or I'll forget what she looked like without looking at a picture.

Brett and Sarah ruined my life, my children's lives, my families lives, and their families lives. They not only robbed my daughter of her life, but me of my future. I will never be known as just Kelsey Kruse anymore. I'll be known as the person whose daughter was horrifically murdered by her father and step mother."