

A Sure and Steadfast Hope

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

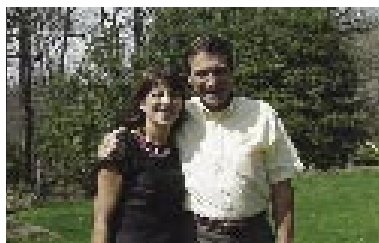
Chip Cuzzo began to drink alcohol when he was a sophomore in high school. He started using steroids because he wanted to “bulk up” his 190-pound frame. He thought he needed to put on weight and increase his size to be a better football player. Like his father, former NFL quarterback Gary Cuzzo, Chip eventually went to college on a football scholarship. Though he had accepted Christ, he began to lead a secret life in the world of drugs.

Chip’s parents, Gary and Peggy, knew Chip felt pressure as Gary’s son. “I began to see signs that he had a big problem with peer pressure, but he internalized it,” recalls Gary. “He had a problem with who his dad was.”

Peggy recalls that Chip “missed his curfew a lot of times. He didn’t want to follow the rules.” During college in 1990, Chip’s secret life finally caught up with him. He had gone to Miami with \$21,000 to buy drugs—meeting two men to buy cocaine. They robbed Chip and shot him to death, dropping his body in front of a public park in broad daylight.

Life had been going well for the Cuzzos. God had gifted them with four children, first Kimberly and soon after their first-born son, Gary, known as Chip. Next came Patrick and Jeffrey. Jeffrey, formerly the pastor of CC Washington Metro in Falls Church, VA, is about to move to England to lead the CC Bible College campus in York.

Gary Cuzzo played ten seasons in the NFL, quarterbacking for the then-Baltimore Colts, New Orleans Saints, Minnesota Vikings, and St. Louis Cardinals. He retired in 1972. While with the Colts, he had the unenviable job of backing up future Hall of Fame Quarterback Johnny Unitas.



Gary and Peggy Cuzzo

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Gary Cuzzo

“Being a backup is difficult. The better the guy you’re backing up does, the worse it is for you, but team success is the greater goal. It disciplines you to do the right thing.” While pregnant with Chip, Peggy was exposed to German measles. Doctors advised abortion because the baby was at high risk for birth defects. The couple’s beliefs precluded that idea. Gary had always been religious, but he approached God as he approached football—by the sweat of his brow. Gary said, “I always honored Jesus as the Son of God but thought I had to do a bunch of stuff for Him.”

A couple of NFL legends, Carroll Dale and Raymond Berry, had been witnessing to Gary. Ray persuaded Gary to attend a Christian camp with him, which took place in June when Peggy was pregnant with Chip. When Gary told Ray about his situation, they brought Gary to a prayer circle. For Gary, this was a revolutionary experience,

“I just didn’t pray with other people. Prayer was something you did in private.”

Chip was born healthy. That drove Gary to examine God’s Word. He accepted Christ and became actively involved with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, eventually becoming the organization’s chairman. While still playing football, he put himself through dental school. He established a successful orthodontics practice in New Jersey after retiring from the Cardinals.

After Chip’s death, Gary went to pick up his son’s belongings from his dorm room. He was surprised to find a series of letters that Chip had written to Gary but never mailed. The letters detailed Chip’s struggles but also reassured Gary and Peggy that their son had, in fact, accepted Christ.

Those who have not had a child die cannot relate to the type of grief that Gary and Peggy endured, but God faithfully saw them and Chip’s siblings through it all. In fact, the experience made their faith stronger. Peggy said, “The day Chip died I learned I don’t have to be a victim of circumstance. I have a loving Savior who meets all of my needs. I still have a purpose. God still has more for me to do.”

The Cuzzos made a videotape that details Chip’s story. Gary has spoken to many groups of young people in an effort to help them realize they are not alone. He wants to help them avoid the emptiness of worldly success and point them to the loving Savior who will never let them down. ☞

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. 1 John 5:13