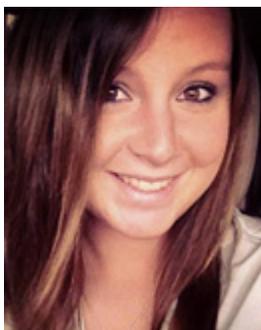


# HSU student says God's love turns tragedy to triumph

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ABILENE—Students at Hardin-Simmons University who found paper hearts on their car windshields on Valentine's Day received more than a routine holiday greeting from a fellow student. The hearts represented an act of healing and a message of hope.



Barbie Claussen Feb. 14 marked the fourth anniversary of a tragedy that changed Barbie Claussen's life. Through each hand-cut paper heart, on which she printed the message, "You are loved," she wanted other students to know how God's love transformed her anger and bitterness into joy.

In [a video](#) posted on [her Facebook page](#), Claussen, a communications major from Kaufman, explained the reason behind the Valentine's Day greetings, telling her story through a series of short messages written on index cards.

"Just like everyone else, I have a story and a past that created what I am today. What's different about me is that I'm using my pain, devastation and failures to paint a new life," the video said.

Four years ago, she was a freshman at Kaufman High School who excelled in volleyball, track and horseback riding. Her life changed at 1:26 p.m. on Feb. 14, 2010, when she collapsed on a volleyball court.

“My back was broken, I couldn’t feel my legs, and the pain was unbearable,” she said.

After about 15 minutes of paralysis, she was able to move her legs again, but she suffered from recurrent numbness in her toes and severe back pain. X-rays revealed multiple fractures that required either extensive surgery or a long regimen of rigorous physical therapy. She opted for physical therapy. But her “Division 1 dreams” of attending a top NCAA school on an athletic scholarship crashed, she said.

“My world stopped. My body, mind and soul ached. For four years, I struggled and developed a raging anger,” the video said. “Anger consumed me, imprisoned me and led me to hate.”

### **Healing in Christ**

At that point spiritually, “I was in no-man’s-land,” she explained in an interview. But toward the end of her junior year in high school, her casual relationship with Christianity took on a newfound purpose as she began to seek God’s purpose for her life. In the process, she found physical and emotional healing in Christ.

“Even with a heart filled with hate, one man loved me the same. One man opened the doors to allow me to play college volleyball, letter in track and train horses for a living,” the video said.

She acknowledged her recovery was difficult, but God’s love and grace sustained her.

“Today, I chose to show everyone a glimpse of kindness and love. ... Random acts of kindness heal the soul,” she said in the video.

### **A Valentine’s Day message**

Claussen chose to distribute hearts to students at Hardin-Simmons because

she remembered how good it made her feel to receive Valentine's cards from classmates when she was in elementary school.

"I wanted to do something personal and unexpected," she explained. So, she decided to cut 1,000 hearts out of construction paper and write on each, "You are loved."

"The employees at Hobby Lobby thought I was crazy when I bought six or seven packages of construction paper," she said.

She averaged about an hour each night for a week and a half working on the project.

During a day when Hardin-Simmons cancelled classes due to ice and snow, she created the video and uploaded it to her computer. On Friday evening, Feb. 14, she posted it to her personal Facebook page, and a couple of days later, friends urged her to post it on the Hardin-Simmons Facebook page.

"I was flooded with comments. People started calling and texting me," she said. "The ones that meant a lot said, 'I needed this.'"

Many viewers particularly were moved by the video's closing message: "My challenge to everyone is to express compassion. You never know what kind of life others may be living. ... What really matters is what happens in us, not to us."