

I AGREE WITH ANNA

For years, Anna Redhair suffered in silence after her father's tragic suicide. Today, this Taylor High School senior shares her story in hopes of helping other Katy teens.

Written by Kelly Isenberger | Photography by Jason Lehecka

Anna Redhair, at home with her dog Chloe, decided to share her story through the "I Agree with Anna" event at Kingsland Baptist Church

D Before October 2011, many people in Katy might not have known the name Anna Redhair. A friendly senior at Taylor High School, you can find Anna on the softball field pitching for the Lady Mustangs or hanging out with her friends watching football. In 2006, *Katy Magazine* spoke with her about a softball mound that was built on her behalf after she unexpectedly lost her father. Since that time, Anna Redhair has grown up and recently shared more of her inspirational story with the community through the I Agree with Anna program this past fall. *Katy Magazine* catches up with this courageous young woman on her journey to help others.

Anna's Story

Anna's father passed away when she was in the sixth grade. "I remember that a lady from the counselor's office came into my class and told me to get all my stuff," she recalls. "Mrs. Marcia, my friend's mom, took us home and we weren't supposed to ask questions. I spent the afternoon with them, and then Mrs. Marcia came and said, 'Your mom is here and she wants to talk to you.' I went outside and my mom was there on the porch swing. She sat me and my sister down on either side of her and said, 'Girls, you didn't know this, but your dad suffered severely from depression, and today he chose to take his life.'"

Anna's world immediately crashed down around her. "Everything I had believed in now seemed irrelevant," she reflects. "Nothing I had believed in was staying the same." Throughout the years, with much support from her friends, family, and church, Anna dealt with the pain but still felt angry at her father for choosing to leave them. "I couldn't understand how my dad, who loved me, would commit suicide," she says. "I was angry, and I thought that I could hide it. I thought I could hide the fact that I had a broken heart."

Forging a New Path

Finally, as a freshman in high school, she chose to let it go. "I finally came to the realization that I could not forgive him in my own strength," Anna shares. "I knew that until I forgave him I could never move past it. I chose to allow God to heal me. I was given the measure of strength I needed to forgive him. It took a while, but I finally got to that point."

In the summer of 2011, as a junior, Anna took a mission trip to Managua, Nicaragua, where she saw how sharing her story allowed her to connect with and encourage others. "One of the things that I took away from the mission trip was that I needed to be more open and share more of my story," says

Anna. What she did not know then was that the opportunity to share her story was right around the corner and it would be bigger than she ever thought.

Sharing Her Story

To bring students together in the community, the student ministry staff at Kingsland Baptist Church faced the task of brainstorming ideas for an event. "We wanted an event that would not just be about one person, but would emphasize Jesus," shares Trisha Stevens, a student minister. "We chose Anna, because she is the real deal. She walks the walk, and we wanted someone who was real." They knew of Anna's story and asked her if she would be willing to share it, as well as use her name to promote the event. Anna prayed about it and agreed to do it.



However, she did not know the actual date of the event, and when Stevens told her that they had chosen Oct. 26, Anna immediately began to cry. Unknowingly, they had chosen the exact day of Anna's father's death. "It was total confirmation for me that this was what God wanted me to do," says Anna. "He had everything worked out."

Soon after, yard signs popped up all over Katy boldly declaring, "I Agree with Anna." Students wore T-shirts to school that made the statement, "I Agree with Anna," and many passed out wristbands with the words, "I Agree with Anna." Many people wondered who this Anna was, and what exactly did she believe.

When the night of Oct. 26 came, Anna stepped on stage and declared, "I believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to the Father except through

Him. I believe He is my refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." Then, she went on to share her story and why she believes in these two points.

Reaching Katy Teens

Anna shared her story with over 1,000 Katy teens, encouraging them to deal with their problems and not keep them hidden like she had done. She urged them to find encouragement in God, who had given her strength and healing. Many students talked to counselors and dealt with issues in their life that night.

People still come to Anna and tell her how much her story encouraged them in their own battles. Those dealing with depression heard how severe the consequences can be, and some have chosen to open up and seek help. For many weeks following the program, people heard about her story through

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Anna (center), with her sister Amy and her mother Carla, says sharing her story brought much healing to her family

Facebook and watched the video on the Internet. To date, the I Agree with Anna website has received over 13,000 hits.

Healing and Forgiveness

As for Anna, the night of the program brought much healing to her family. "Before I Agree with Anna, Oct. 26 was a dreaded day," Anna shares. "Talking about it that night liberated me even more from the sadness and it let more of the good memories come back. Now that day won't just be the day my dad passed away. It won't be a day I have to dread anymore."

Anna is still undecided about what her future holds, but she can look to it with hope and freedom from the burden she had been carrying for so many years. Sharing her story with others has given her a new boldness and courage to open up about life. Anna says, "When we're honest with other people, it opens so many doors and conversations that we usually hide and don't talk about." KM

KELLY ISENBERGER is a Katy mom of two, and she agrees with Anna.

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