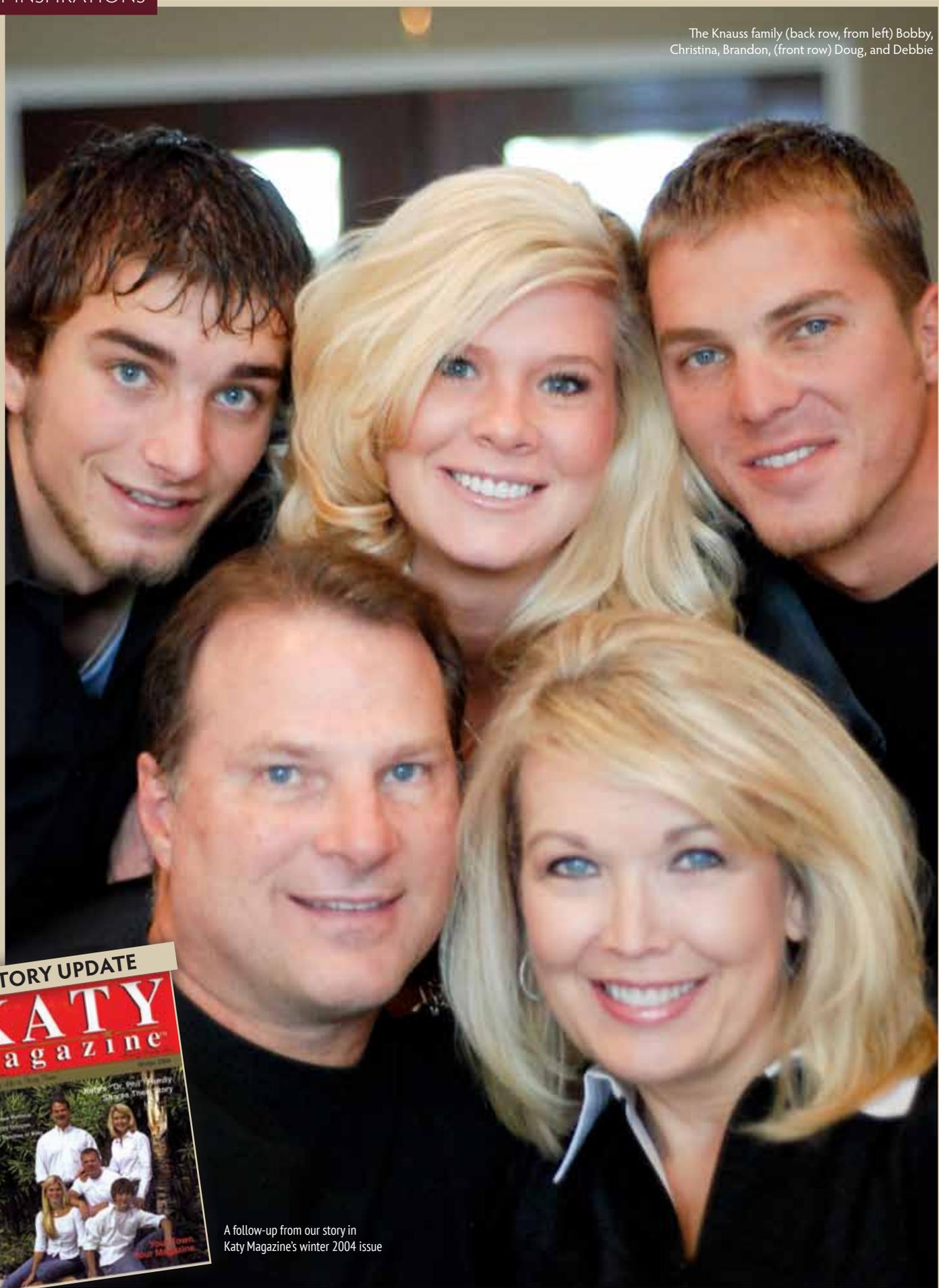
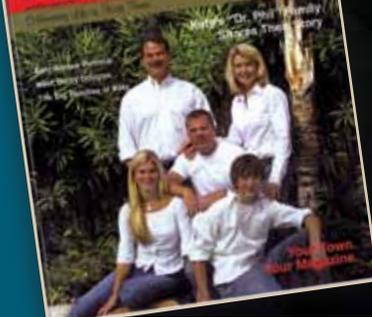


The Knauss family (back row, from left) Bobby, Christina, Brandon, (front row) Doug, and Debbie



STORY UPDATE

**KATY**  
magazine



A follow-up from our story in  
Katy Magazine's winter 2004 issue

THE KNAUSS FAMILY: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

# Keeping up with Katy's Dr. Phil Family

Several years after sharing Brandon's story of addiction on the Dr. Phil show, the Knauss family lands an intervention show on TLC helping other families in crisis

Written by Mary Hogan | Photography Courtesy of Owen Junior

Almost nine years ago, the Knauss family, then living in Katy, found themselves struggling to help their oldest son Brandon overcome an addiction to prescription painkillers. Desperate for healing, they sought help from Dr. Phil McGraw, going on the Dr. Phil show in fall 2003 for a televised family intervention – one of the first ever in the U.S. They had no idea then how many other families they themselves would eventually be helping through similar situations. When Katy Magazine first featured the Knauss family in our winter 2004 issue, Brandon was more than a year into his recovery, and they were still in touch with Dr. Phil producers.

Now, after appearing on more than 50 episodes of *Dr. Phil* and *The Doctors*, the Knausses have made a career out of helping others through their intervention company VIP Recovery, located in the Dallas area. Mom Debbie and Brandon work together during many interventions, and the whole family has been incredibly supportive of the venture. Both TV shows also recently announced the Sept. 12 premiere of the Knauss family's upcoming reality TV show, *The Rehabilitators* on TLC Discovery. "The show is about our family business and the pressures that come from performing the kinds of services we do," shares dad Doug Knauss, who oversees VIP Recovery's legal, accounting, and marketing operations.

## Reaching out as a Family

Shortly after their first appearance on *Dr. Phil* aired, Debbie and Doug received a call from the show about a family in Los Angeles struggling with a similar situation. They were at a crisis point and were asking to be put in touch with the Knauss family. "It was really an indirect first intervention, and we assisted the family to the extent that we could," recalls

Doug. Their passion for helping others snowballed. "The more families that wanted to talk to us and get involved with us, the more it became a passion," he shares.

"Brandon has the ability to really connect with the person struggling on a deeper level, because he's been there. He can also hold them accountable in a different way than a licensed professional can."

—Debbie Knauss

During that time, their interest in finding better ways of counseling those with addictions also intensified. When Debbie asked Brandon to assist with a particularly demanding intervention, they discovered they worked great together as a team. Many times, a single interventionist will give it their all, and after an hour or two, if there's no cooperation, they give up. But when two interventionists work together, they're able to pick up where the other leaves off.

"Brandon has the ability to really connect with the person struggling on a deeper level, because he's been there. He can also hold them accountable in a different way than a licensed professional can," shares Debbie, who is a registered nurse, licensed chemical dependency counselor, and substance abuse professional. "He can get on the level where the person is and speak their language."

## A Passion for Changing Lives

Debbie still remembers one of the most difficult drug addiction interventions she ever assisted with. The upper middle class family of a young man in New York, pushed to their emotional breaking point, had sought her guidance and help. The intervention went on for hours and hours, because his addiction to various drugs – and an unknown addiction to heroin - had such tremendous power over him. Thankfully, Debbie had asked Brandon to travel with her to New York for the meeting.

She recalls how Brandon had recognized the track marks signaling heroin use on the young man's arm when they took a break outside away from family members. Using his own painful past experience with addiction, Brandon was able to identify with his situation and earn his trust, eventually getting the young man to open up and accept that he needed help.

An important part of Debbie's job is following up with the families that she and Brandon help, much the way that Dr. Phil and his team followed up with them all those years ago. Today, she takes solace in knowing that the young man in New York, who was once so close to the edge, is now a successful college graduate who is married with a child. "When you discover your purpose or passion in life and you know what that is, it's not like going to work," Debbie shares. "It can be exhausting, but it's the passion that motivates you. When I take that first phone call, that family is in my thoughts and prayers forever."

## Everyone Is a VIP to Someone

VIP Recovery, which stands for Vital Intervention Professionals Recovery, seeks to educate, motivate, and activate the healing process. "We can't heal, but we can help get them to the point that the entire healing process within the family begins," explains Doug. "If we can accomplish that, then we accomplish our objective."

Guided by the belief that everyone is an important person in someone else's life, the Knauss family invests much time, energy, and heart into every intervention they undertake. This can mean flying cross-country at a moment's notice to stage an emergency intervention and spending hours upon hours – sometimes nearing an entire day – working with the person in need and their family. "No matter what, we do not give up," says Debbie. "As long as there's a beating heart, their life is

worth saving. We will do what it takes, no matter what, and we never know what it will look like."

## Giving Back on the Go

Part of what *The Rehabilitators* hopes to capture is the Knauss family's new dynamic, going from the comfort and predictability of a suburban lifestyle to a less structured, 24/7 life calling. Debbie still remembers being at the hospital when her daughter had her second child and getting a call from Dr. Phil producers with an intervention emergency. "They said, 'How soon can you be on a plane?'" she recalls. Immediately, she headed for home to grab the bag she always keeps packed

and ready to go. "It can be draining," admits Debbie. "You never know what situation you're going into or for how long, and the family is depending on you."

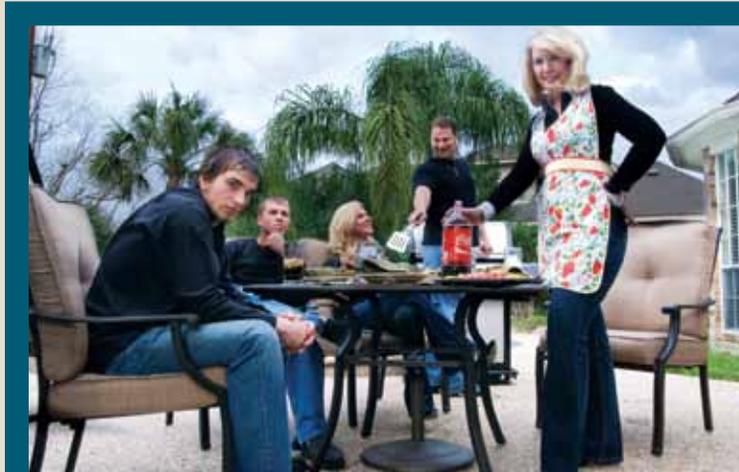
Along with helping others, Debbie finds it rewarding to work alongside her son, even though she sometimes has to remind herself to take her "mom" hat off while working. Spontaneous moments, like finding themselves at the BET Awards

while in Los Angeles one year or running into Lady Gaga while in New York are experiences she will never forget. "For Brandon, there is no closed door," she shares. "He's taught me so much about just living life in the present and enjoying the moment."

## Honored to Help Others Heal

With *The Rehabilitators* set to air on Sept. 12 on TLC Discovery and VIP Recovery continuing to help families struggling with addiction, the Knauss family hopes to reach more and more people. Debbie says, "It's such an honor when a family in crisis reaches out and then trusts us to be able to come into their very private world, create a plan and educate them about what's going on with their loved one, and put that plan into action in order to save someone's life." **KM**

*MARY HOGAN enjoys being associate editor of Katy Magazine and feels privileged to share the amazing story of such an inspirational family.*



The Knauss family enjoys an afternoon together, which can be a rare occurrence given Debbie and Brandon's hectic schedules conducting interventions across the U.S.

Learn more about **VIP Recovery** and addiction interventions by visiting [viprecovery.com](http://viprecovery.com)

Watch **The Rehabilitators** on Sept. 12 on TLC Discovery. For show times, visit [tlc.discovery.com](http://tlc.discovery.com).