

The couple share their sorrows, joys, and hopes in *Without a Word*.

Jim and Jill Kelly's Hope

>>> **NFL Hall of Fame quarterback Jim Kelly faced more than his share of challenges during four trips to the Super Bowl, yet his biggest challenge came in his personal life when his son, Hunter, was diagnosed with Krabbe Leucodystrophy, a rare, often-fatal degenerative disorder that affects the nervous system.**

Without a Word: How a Boy's Unspoken Love Changed Everything (FaithWords, c, \$23.99, ISBN: 9780446563376) written by Jim's wife, Jill, documents the Kelly family's struggle through difficult times with a terminally ill child. It's a celebration of Hunter's life and the Kellys' discovery of Christ's love during this difficult time—and how, through following the Lord, they grew strong. It's the story of a family saved.

Jill and Jim remain committed to their organization, Hunter's Hope Foundation, which brings awareness to Krabbe Dystrophy and supports research with the hope of one day finding a cure. The Foundation also supports the needs of families affected by this disease.

I recently had a chance to speak with Jill and Jim by phone to discuss the book and a very special young boy who deeply touched those blessed enough to know him.

Jill, what was your primary reason for writing *Without a Word*?

Jill Kelly: Jim and I were just discussing this exact thing. I would say, first and foremost, it was clearly a call from God. I had no intentions of writing a book. I ran from this for years. But I was feeling Him say, "Jill, write this down."

I also wanted to write this book for our daughters, because they were young and growing up with Hunter, and I wanted them to have a chronicle of what God did in our family—not just to [Jim and my] lives, but to their lives as well, because they're going to grow and eventually have their own children. Now they have a chronicle of what God did to rescue our family. And [Hunter] is where it all started, because neither Jim nor I were Christians when Hunter was born. So God rescued us in the midst of our time with him. And [our daughters] need to know that and how they were a part of that.

What do you hope readers will take away from your family's story?

Jill: There are two things I hope for: First, I hope believers will be absolutely encouraged. That despite all the statistics and odds that were against us, because God intervened in dramatic ways, we were saved. This is a story of encouragement and hope, and pressing on in our faith. Also, it's my heart's desire that the book helps the person who doesn't know God in a personal way—a person who maybe is a football fan who knows about Jim, or may know about us through Hunter's Hope. It's my prayer that the person who doesn't know God will pick up this book and be changed, and that they'll share the story with others who may be experiencing some of the same challenges with a family member that we did, and are enduring their own trials. We all come from different places and have different trials, but suffering links our hearts together in a way that nothing else can. I hope our story of suffering will provide hope to those who are in the midst of suffering so they realize that with God there is triumph in all sorts of circumstances. Marriages can be rescued and families will be made whole. One profound thing God revealed to me is that we needed healing more than Hunter did. God was going to work out a way to heal us...and He did.

Jim Kelly: We're very proud of this book. It exposes intimate details of difficult things that we went through in our lives. Without God's grace and a lot of prayers, we wouldn't be in the good situation we are now. So I thank God every day for that.

How did you and your family grow in your relationship with God as a result of Hunter?

Jill: Where do I start? Through my one-and-only son's suffering, I was brought to Christ. So my one-and-only son brought me to God's one-and-only Son. And through my new relationship with Christ, He just came in and took over, literally, in every way.

There was an atmosphere of life in our home—whereas before Jesus intervened, it was an atmosphere of death. Hunter was dying, and we all were dying, being away from the Lord. As soon as He intervened, we all started living. We all started growing in Christ. I remember one Mother's Day,

FOREWORD BY
FAITH HILL AND TIM MCGRAW

Without a Word

*How a Boy's Unspoken Love
Changed Everything*



"Jill and I have never shared Hunter's story like this, until now."
JIM KELLY, Hall of Fame Quarterback, Buffalo Bills

JILL KELLY



Jill Kelly

Jim learned Psalm 23. This let me know that God had a hand on Jim's heart. Because I wanted my husband, of course, to have the same hope I had. God,

quite literally, saved all of us.

What's your ultimate goal for Hunter's Hope?

Jill: Our ultimate goal is to continue being an encouragement to families struggling with the disease. We want to provide hope for a disease that was very hopeless when we first learned about it. We are now the place where people can go when they're affected by [Krabbe Dystrophy]. There was nothing like Hunter's Hope before. We're there for the families.

Jim: We've done quite a bit with newborn screening, and I've been involved with that, traveling to different states to help make sure each state is up to par with their screening. There's so much more we know now than we did when Hunter was diagnosed. Every state is different when it comes to their screening, and lots of children could die as a result of being born in the wrong state. It's important more work be done with newborn screening.

Through our work, we strive to not just focus on Krabbe Dystrophy and other families, but also to focus on the big picture—helping kids touched by the disease so they one day achieve their goals and dreams. —Interview conducted by Phillip Samuelson.