



Travis Wayne Koehler, 26

By: *Deb Koehler-Fergen, Mother of Travis*



Travis was a son, grandson, brother, uncle and fiancé. He was our middle son and both his older and younger brother looked to him for help or advice. He made life easier for me in many ways. He did that for many people in his life. Travis aspired of becoming an Assistant Chief Engineer at his place of work after his supervisors retired. He was taking classes, on his own dime and time, to be ready. Travis was killed on the job on February 2, 2007. With no confined spaces training, he was ordered to BETRAY THE RULES of Confined Spaces, which the Chief Engineer Supervisors allowed. Two days prior, their new safety manager had told the supervisors, as he drove with them around the property, to mark the manholes and implement confined space training to their people. In the meantime, he told them to keep them away from those spaces. However, two days later, the supervisors decided to ignore the directive of the safety manager. Rather than waiting for the contracted pump company, they failed to get the required permit, or notify the fire department's heavy rescue squad, and instead sent Richard Luzier, into a space he was totally unfamiliar with. Due to the release of highly toxic gasses he was unable to exit the space and the supervisors, fully aware of the dangers, chose to yell at Travis to get down into the space and help Rick. Remember, they had no training, so Travis had no idea what he faced. He was almost immediately overcome by the fumes and collapsed yet the supervisors yelled at a third worker to go down and help Travis and Rick! Nevada OSHA began an investigation into the incident. The lead investigator told us this was the most egregious case he had ever seen. He recommended several Willful violations plus others. He expressed concern to me that, for an unknown reason, he was slowly being left out of the meetings and other communications regarding the case, by his superiors. He was so angered by the way OSHA handled my son's case, and the corruption he felt went on, that he quit the Nevada agency. The original Willful and Repeat violations were downgraded to Serious. The fine was \$185,000. The dollar value of the fine aligned with the fine for Willful violations even though they were not charged with them. I have made the claim that NV OSHA was influenced by the gaming company, all the way to the Governor's office, to make this nightmare they created go away. It is my contention that many lives on the City Center construction project

could have been saved had NV OSHA sent a strong message by holding the gaming company fully responsible in every way and given the maximum penalties and fines.

Our family has felt the absence of Travis in so many ways. Not only was he deprived of getting married, but he missed the marriages of his two brothers and the births of six nephews, not to mention the children he would have had. He has missed countless holiday's and celebrations. We were all robbed of having him in our lives, feeling his hugs and seeing his big grin when he was being goofy. I am sure that in time he would have achieved his dream of becoming an assistant chief as he had planned and was going to school for, but instead his trust was betrayed by his supervisors and the culture of lax safety at all the gaming corporation's properties. Which continues to this day! In 2008, Travis was recognized by the *Carnegie Hero Foundation* and was posthumously awarded the Carnegie Hero Medal for his selfless act of attempting to rescue his coworker. He was also chosen by the Congressional Medal of Honor Society to receive the 2009 Above and Beyond Citizen Honors State Finalist Award.

USMWF is an organization that reaches out to family members who have been left behind by the death of their loved one. The only one of its kind in the country and has been able to make a big impact in bringing awareness to the terrible losses that 12 to 16 families face each day in our country.

Travis represents just 1 of the 14 workers killed in Nevada last year. You can make a difference.

