



**February  
2022**



**If this is your first Newsletter:**

*If you are receiving this newsletter for the first time, it is because someone has told us it might be helpful for you. We also invite you to our monthly meetings at Hayes Barton Baptist Church. At these meetings you may talk or choose not to say a word. There are no fees or dues. We are sorry you have had to experience the death of a child (or children) but we are here for you. We, too, are on this journey of grief and extend our hearts and arms to you.*

<b>Inside this Issue:</b>	
Love Gifts February Meetings In Memory of Michael Mendy	2
Grief and Your Critical Self	3
Do You Have Any Siblings?	4
Do You Have Siblings (cont'd) Semper Parente	5
There Is Hope After Loss	6
My Hopeful Heart	7
Surviving the Suicide of My Son	8
The Trouble with Condolences	9
February Birthdays	10
February Anniversaries	11

Our Wake County TCF Chapter meets every second and fourth Tuesday nights of the month at 7:00pm in Room 224 at Hayes Barton Baptist Church, 1800 Glenwood Avenue (at the corner of Glenwood Avenue and Whitaker Mill Road at Five Points) in Raleigh. Enter from Whitaker Mill Road into the Main Entrance of the Family Life Center.

**February Meetings**

**Tuesday  
February 8th  
7:00pm**

**Tuesday  
February 22nd  
7:00pm**

*Buried Heart*



*My heart stopped the day you died  
I put it away in a heavy, metal box  
Away from laughter and sunlight.*

*I buried the box  
Beneath guilt, regrets and the pain of not saying goodbye  
Deeply buried under the pain of missing you*

*I went searching for you  
In forests, mountains and jungles  
In deserts, meadows and beaches  
Searching for a look, a trace, a glimpse of you*

*But you came looking for me  
In strange, unexpected places  
You'd show up for a brief moment when least expected  
Bringing me a bird, a song, a sign  
Unmistakably you*

*To show your love for me  
To comfort me  
To sustain me until we embrace again*

*—Karen Howe, for Claire*



**IN MEMORY**  
**FEBRUARY LOVE GIFTS**  
 Given In Loving Memory Of Children



Toni Amirante  
 In Loving Memory of My Son  
**William Vincent Amirante**  
 "Never Forgotten"

Barbara and John Dower  
 In Loving Memory of Our Son  
**Robert Cording Dower**

Jean Goldberg  
 In Loving Memory of My Son  
**Tommy Goldberg**

Larry and Susan Helfant  
 In Loving Memory of Our Son  
**Michael Helfant**

Kathleen and Mike Mendy  
 In Loving Memory of Our Son  
**Michael Daniel Mendy**

Thomas and Debra Winar  
 In Loving Memory of Our Son  
**Thomas M. Winar II**

Please send Love Gifts to: Love Gifts—Wake County Chapter, TCF, P. O. Box 6602, Raleigh, NC 27628-6602. Send pictures & articles to Pattie Griffin at [pattie.grif@gmail.com](mailto:pattie.grif@gmail.com) or 30 Shepherd Street, Raleigh NC 27607.

**ATTENTION**  
**In-Person February Meetings**

We will meet at Hayes Barton Baptist Church in the Five Points neighborhood of Raleigh, at 7:00pm on Tuesday, February 8th and Tuesday, February 22nd. Hayes Barton requires us to wear a face mask when entering the church and walking through common areas, but vaccinated adults may remove their masks inside the meeting room. The church requires us to keep a list of attendees (in case follow-up is needed). At the same time there will also be a "hybrid" meeting, with participants present in person and on Zoom simultaneously. Please let us know which way you prefer. If you want the Zoom link, email Judy Schneider at

**[jschn\\_2000@yahoo.com](mailto:jschn_2000@yahoo.com)**

**Hayes Barton Baptist Church is located at 1800 Glenwood Avenue (at the corner of Glenwood Avenue and Whitaker Mill Road at Five Points in Raleigh) Our meeting is in Room 224.**



*In Memory of*  
**Michael Daniel Mendy**



Love from Mom & Dad  
 Kathleen and Mike Mendy

# Grief and Your Critical Self

by Dr. Bob Baugher

Most experts on human behavior agree that just about all of us have a critical self. You know what I'm talking about: that part of your brain that jumps on you when you have made a mistake/blunder/error/slipup. Sometimes it sneaks up on you, "Gotcha." Other times you can feel it well up inside you. Either way, there it is speaking its unforgiving words and phrases such as, "You screwed up." "What's



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wrong with you?" "You did it, again." "What an idiot." The question is, "If it's so common, where does it come from?" Since most of us have it in some manner, it would seem that it must be inherited. However, there is yet to be discovered the "critical self" gene. Of course our next culprit has to be our poor parents who get blamed for everything. For example, until psychologists discovered that schizophrenia was almost exclusively caused by physiological alterations in the brain, they blamed it on—you guessed it—Mom. They actually coined a term for it: "The Schizophrenogenic Mother." Yes, it is true that our parents were critical of us during our growing up years—and some parents continue doing it to this day. (But we won't mention any names, now, will we?)

Another possible bad guy is the tendency for many of us to beat ourselves up. We convince ourselves, that, in order to somehow make ourselves into becoming a "better person" or "learn from our mistakes" or because we "deserve to be self-punished," we must be critical at every misstep.

How does all this relate to grief? Someone you love died—your child, grandchild, your brother, your sister. You are left without this precious person in your life. You are in such pain that you are absolutely convinced you will feel this way forever. In the midst of all this what does our critical self say to us? See if you recognize any of these choice statements:

1. I should have done more to prevent the death.
2. Looking back, I was too hard on this person.
3. I'm not grieving right—I'm too angry (or) I should be angrier.
4. It's been a while and people are wondering when I'm going to move on. What's wrong with me?
5. I've got to pull it together—and I can't.

Do you see the critical self rearing its ugly head? Here you are in the depths of despair and, rather than being gentle with yourself at the very time you need caring, what do you do? You beat yourself up. Let's look at it another way (I've said this before in other articles I've written): If your best friend were in the exact situation, would you utter critical statements to him or her such as the ones listed above? Of course not.

Try this: When you start to fall into the critical mindset, catch yourself and say positive things to yourself such as: "I know I'm not perfect and have made mistakes." "I need to let go of these negative thoughts." "I need to be gentle to myself." "My child (or sibling or grandchild) would not want me to be so hard on myself." "I am a good person."

The question I always ask at this point is: Can you begin to treat yourself as gently as you would your best friend? I bet your best friend and your loved one would want you to.

And, so do I.

—Regards, Dr. Bob

Dr. Bob Baugher is a Psychology Instructor at Highline College in Des Moines, Washington where he teaches courses in Psychology and Death Education. As a trainer for Living-Works he has trained more than 1,000 people in suicide intervention. Dr. Baugher has written several books and articles on grief and loss. He has been invited to give workshops at TCF National Conferences for the past 20 years and has been the professional adviser to parents and siblings of the South King County (Seattle) Chapter of The Compassionate Friends for 30 years.

TCF *We Need Not Walk Alone*, Autumn/Winter 2021



Did you know:  
When you truly listen to each other,  
You say I love you.

~ Sascha Wagner

# Do You Have Any Siblings?

by Lynn Shattuck

I don't feel the warm rush of panic flood my chest when I'm asked this question anymore, though I've never quite gotten used to it. As a middle-aged mom, I don't actually hear it as much anymore. When I'm getting to know someone new, our inquiries tend to center around kids or jobs or news.

So when someone asked me recently, I was caught off guard.

We were at my mom's doctor appointment. My mind flitted around from the fire alarm that had delayed her appointment by a half hour to my mom's health to the stubborn disbelief that I was sitting there instead of my dad, who died a year and a half ago.

"Do you have any grandchildren?" the doctor asked my mother. My mom told him about my children. Then, before I could even see the question hurtling toward me, the doctor turned and asked me: "Do you have any brothers or sisters?"

The question sat between us, ripe and waiting.

"No," I said. I shook my head, glanced at my feet.

For a moment, I wondered: If the doctor had asked my mom if she had other children, would she have answered the same? Or would she have told the truth?

In the early years after my brother's death, the question haunted me. As a twentysomething at the time, I heard it often.

*Do you have any brothers or sisters?*

If I said, no, I don't have a brother, I felt like I wasn't honoring my



younger brother, Will, who died at 21 from substance abuse. Saying no also felt inherently dishonest. It painted an untrue picture — I had not been raised as an only child. I'd been Will's sister since I was three; I could barely remember being un-brothered.

But if I said, yes, I had a brother, I'd have to also say that he died. Otherwise, they might ask where my brother lived, and if I answered, "In a box in my parent's liquor cabinet," things would get weird.

Dropping death into polite small talk almost always turns awkward. We don't learn how to speak about topics like death and grief and overdoses in school — we learn it either by being thrust into the bog of it or by having an unusually open and curious heart.

At some point, I decided on a loose rule for dealing with the inevitable question. If someone I was unlikely to have any type of consequential future relationship with — for instance, a hair stylist in a town I didn't live in — asked me if I had siblings, I'd say no and try to pivot the conversation to safer ground.

If it was someone I might be edging closer to, like a neighbor or a new friend, I'd tell the truth: I had a younger brother, and he

died.

The harder, more painful question now is the internal one that pulses just beneath the surface. No one has asked me it; I doubt anyone will. It's deeper and more crushing.

*Am I still a sister?*

It's been nearly 22 years now since my brother died. He's been gone for longer than he was here. And while the brutal loss doesn't haunt me every moment like it did in those early months, it remains etched on my heart. It continues to evolve, just like our relationship would've. Should've.

A year and a half ago, when my dad was diagnosed with advanced lung cancer and my mom and I sat at his bedside, I sometimes imagined a third chair with us, my brother filling it. In the loneliness of my dad's illness and death, I felt the stark pain of my missing brother rush over me again, the wide reminder of all the awful and beautiful thresholds he should've been here for.

Sometimes I wonder if acquaintances ever see my posts on social media and wonder why I'm still writing about my brother's death all these years later. Why I keep dredging it up, running my fingers through the silt. Maybe I'd tell them it's because I can still summon up those metallic early months after Will died, the vast loneliness of searching for books to accompany me in my grief and finding more literature on pet loss than on sibling loss.

David Kessler, an expert in grief who worked with death and dying guru Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, has posited that there's an often overlooked sixth stage

## Do You Have Any Siblings? *(continued from last page)*

of grief — meaning making. My interpretation of this sixth stage is that by taking some of the love I have for Will and alchemizing it into words that might help other grieving siblings, my love for him has somewhere meaningful and tangible to go.

I often receive messages from people who are wading through the raw and murky days after a sibling has died. I'm always touched by these, always grateful. I usually say a little prayer for them, for the missing galaxy of their lost sister or brother, for all the future they feel robbed of.

And I also say a thank you — to my brother, to the universe, to some unseen power — for allowing me the opportunity to extend my hand, to peer back at all the milestones I've crossed and continue to cross without my brother. Because in these moments of quiet connection, in these slivers of mentorship, I still feel like a sister.

*Lynn Shattuck grew up in an Alaskan rainforest and now lives in Maine. Her work has appeared in "Elephant Journal," "Headspace," and "Mind Body Green," among other outlets. Lynn is currently writing a memoir about her brother's death. To learn more about her, visit her website, The Light Will Find You.*

TCF *We Need Not Walk Alone*, Autumn/Winter 2021



## Semper Parente

by Karen Quandt



There is no name for my situation in this world. Both my sons died and I am a parent without children. There is no name for a parent without children.

The name for a child whose parents have died is orphan. The name for a spouse whose husband or wife has died is widow or widower. Is it because it is so painful and unimaginable that no one could bear to name them?

J.K. Rowling writes in her series of Harry Potter novels that the villain Voldemort, considered to have been the most powerful and dangerous dark wizard of all time, is so terrifying that he is called "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named." Albus Dumbledore, Harry Potter's headmaster, says "call him Voldemort, Harry. Always use the proper name for things. Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself." Identifying and naming your fear is the first step towards understanding your fear.

There is power in naming your fear. An unnamed fear remains vague and nebulous and grows larger in size due to the fact that it cannot be defined and contained in a name. When you can clearly name your fear, it can connect you to new ways of thinking that will open doors for you.

I want to call myself and other parents who have lost a child, "semper parente." It is Latin and when translated into English means "always parent." It is an understanding of the infinite nature of being a parent. It changes the paradigm of parenthood, and expands the timeline beyond this world. The fact that I was a parent and had children changes eternity. Nothing can change that fact. *Semper parente,*

*always a parent.* This name binds me and my children in eternity.

It is fitting that a novel about an orphan helps me understand the need for a name for myself. Harry's parents were killed by Voldemort when he was a baby and the love from his parents provided protection for Harry to survive Voldemort's attack. With the help of magic, Harry's parents provide courage and support for Harry in his ongoing battles with Voldemort. Using reverse logic, Harry's parents are "*semper parentibus*" or "always parents" in eternity. They are bound to Harry in his world and into eternity.

It is also fitting that *semper parente* is Latin. Latin is considered a dead language because it is no longer a spoken language. But it was transformed into Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Romanian. Latin is used today in technical fields when clarification is important, such as in medical terminology. Clarification is important in choosing a name for a parent whose child has died. *Semper parente* defines me and it transforms the meaning of my parenthood into the infinite.

*Karen Quandt became a pediatric nurse while serving in the United States Army at Ft. Lewis, Washington. She lives with her husband Gene in Washington State. Karen has a master's degree in community health nursing and is currently writing grants and organizing respite care for medically fragile children. Karen has learned through her professional and personal experience that most of the nursing care for patients is done in the home by families. The families need much more support to care for their loved ones than is currently available. Karen is a member of ARCH (Access to Respite Care and Help). Karen and Gene are *semper parentibus* to their sons Tim who died in 2009 at the age of 22 and Ty who died in 2017 at the age of 20.*

# THERE IS HOPE AFTER LOSS

by Linda Pacha

My nineteen-year-old son, Nick, died by suicide when he jumped from a bridge just outside his college campus. His body was lost for almost five weeks. The week prior to its retrieval, I received a call from a coroner who had misidentified another teen's body for my son's. That boy and his girlfriend jumped just two weeks after Nick. Meanwhile, my family tried to remove two cruel videos posted online after the suicide—one making fun of Nick's death. Losing a child to suicide is horrific, and these events certainly compounded the pain.



It is now seven years after my son's suicide. It's important for other parents who are just starting the grief process to know that there is still hope. Life as you once knew it may be over, however, your life is not over. Your family's life is not over. You can get through this. The grief process is grueling and requires a lot of work, but you will find joy again. I'm not going to lie, some of the pain will always be there because you deeply miss your loved one, but you will be happy and engage in life again.

At first, all loss survivors toss and turn in anguish, wondering what you could have done differently, what signs you missed, what things you could have said or done to prevent the unthinkable. You mentally try to rewrite your tragedy. Remember, the suicide was not your fault, so stop blaming yourself or anyone else. Blame only hinders the healing process and cannot bring back your loved one. As you make your way back into society, you will be faced with stigma and people's misconceptions about suicide, like your loved one was selfish, lacked faith, or was a coward. None of these are true, of course. He/she was in pain, a pain so unbearable that it overpowered and extinguished any instinct to survive. No living person can truly understand the exact level of pain it takes to end one's own life. You will eventually learn how to politely "call out" people's misconceptions in a way that offers them information in hopes of changing their views.

The anniversaries and birthdays will always be tough days, as well as the days leading up to them, because your anticipation triggers memo-

ries, reminds you of your loss, and can even reopen some wounds. The good news is that even those days eventually get less painful overtime. You learn to make them days to celebrate your loved one's life and not special days of mourning.

Each year gets a little better. For example, you will learn what works best for you when you have to answer that painful question, "How many kids do you have?"

Over time, you will learn how to live with your loss. You are a survivor. Your tragedy has most likely made you more empathetic toward others while giving you a better understanding of what is important in life. Use all of this knowledge in your relationships and interactions with others. Some of you may even choose to use your loss to help others. I know this continues to give me joy.

After my son died, I founded Nick's Network of Hope ([nicksnetworkofhope.org](http://nicksnetworkofhope.org)), a suicide prevention nonprofit. Our website is an information portal to raise awareness, provide resources, and offer hope. Recently, I wrote and published a help book for those struggling in life or suffering the aftermath of loss, as well as for anyone wanting to help these individuals. *Saving Ourselves from Suicide—Before and After: How to Ask for Help, Recognize Warning Signs, and Navigate Grief* will help grieving families and people like my son. Knowing this allows me to see Nick's death as more than a tragedy. I can't change what happened, but I can use it to help others climb out of a dark hole and find hope.

You will find your own meaningful ways to honor your loved one. Picking up the pieces and rebuilding your life in a productive way that is loving and kind certainly do that. It takes time for it all to come together, so be patient with yourself. Grieving is hard work, especially the first two years, but you've got this. Don't lose hope because better days are ahead. You will smile, laugh, and enjoy life again.

**LINDA PACHA** is an attorney, a public speaker, and founder/president of Nick's Network of Hope, a nonprofit that provides resources, education, and support about life challenges with an emphasis on mental health awareness, suicide prevention, and grief and loss ([nicksnetworkofhope.org](http://nicksnetworkofhope.org)).

Sometimes in life we have to go through profound sadness in order to find our hope. This is my journey of finding My Hopeful Heart.

It has been nine years ago today that I lost my beloved daughter. Every year when this day is upon me I am filled with an overwhelming sense of sadness and anxiety because a part of me is gone that I know I will never get back. I am lost on this day, and these feelings never go away. They are with me every hour of every day. I have had to learn to live with these feelings, which are difficult, more than I could have ever imagined. It makes some days harder to get through than others. You deal with a different kind of normal, and emotions that are totally foreign. Losing a child changes everything. It changes who you are as a person in this unknown world that you have been thrust into. At times it is unbearable. Sometimes the anger grabs you and you think it will never let go. You never fully get on with your life, and there is no such thing as closure. But I realized early on that I must try and do my best to persevere and move forward for my family, my friends, and for myself, no matter how hard this may be (and it was extremely hard), because I know my daughter would want this for me. There is always hope in my heart.

I have become the person I am today in large part because of my daughter. I know what it is like to be the mother of a beautiful, fun, happy, loving, kind, compassionate and caring girl. I know what it is like to have a daughter. For that short period of time that I was blessed with I will be forever grateful. My daughter made me a mom. She was my firstborn. I became a playgroup mom, room mom, Sunday School mom, Girl Scout mom, dance mom, carpool mom, and a shopping mom, just to name a few. Some of the happiest times of my life were spent with her being all these various moms. But the role I truly cherish

was just being her mom. That is something that will always be part of my soul. I will always have that, and that is what I hold on to. There is always hope in my heart.

Someday our children will leave us to lead their own lives. Some will leave us to go away to college. Some will leave us to serve our country. Some will leave us to pursue careers. Some will leave us to get married and start families. And some will leave us because of the unimaginable; death. This is by far the most difficult and painful way that our children leave us because we know they are never coming back. There is no understanding it. There is no making sense of it. But I realize because of this, no matter how I feel, I have to make room for hope in my heart. Hope that the memories of my daughter will live on forever through me, through her dad, through her brother, and through her extended family and her friends. Hope that I can help others that are caught in the grips of grief and maybe make a difference. Hope that I know with the love and support of my family and friends I will continue to move forward and lead a life that I am proud of. Hope that I know that I am not alone in this journey. There is always hope in my heart.

Hope gives me the courage to live with my broken heart, which I will have forever. Hope allows me to be happy at times and not feel guilty. Hope lets me know that there is no time limit on grief, not because I am sad, but because I am embracing my feelings of how much I love and miss my daughter. Hope is realizing that I can reminisce about my daughter, hear her name without always shedding tears, and instead sometimes smile. Hope is turning "what might have been" into comforting daydreams. Hope soothes my shattered spirit. There is always hope in my heart.

I am forever grateful to my family and friends who stood by my side and continue to do so throughout this

journey. They have made the impossible possible. I am surviving down this long hard road because they have given me hope in my heart.

I would not have been able to write this without the unconditional love and support of my husband and my son. They are everything to me. They inspire and encourage me every day. I love you both more than I could ever put into words. I am grateful that they brought laughter, fun, and peace back into our lives. I am so blessed to have them both. They are the hope in my heart.

Lastly, there are times in life when we are faced with inconceivable loss, devastation or adversity. But when we look deep inside ourselves, no matter how difficult that is, hope is there, just waiting. Be patient for it. Be open to it. Hope will come if you give it a chance. We all deserve hope in our hearts.

I will always love and always miss my daughter. She is in my heart and soul forever. She will always be part of who I am. I know that this feeling of grief will be with me for the rest of my life. Grief, in some way, defines who I am now. I have hope because of the love my daughter showed to all of us and the love I have for her. She was loved by so many. I have hope that my heart will continue to grow stronger each and every day. Because of my daughter, I will always have hope in my heart. And I wish you to always have hope in yours.

*Barbara Hurst is a native of Detroit, MI. She and husband Jon currently reside in Birmingham, AL. They have been married for 33 years and have two children. She is a former court reporter turned scopist/editor, who loves to write, and has had her own scoping business since 2003. Barbara lost her 15-year-old daughter Natalie in a tragic car crash in 2010. While in the throes of her own sorrow, she realized that she wanted to help others in their journey to navigate the tumultuous and difficult path of grief.*

# Surviving the Suicide of My Son

by Laura Stack

I survived it. The worst day of my life was November 21, 2019, at 1:03 AM, when the coroner told my husband and me our son, Johnny, had died by suicide a few hours ago, on November 20. In the immediate days following, I alternated between screaming, sobbing, and being unable to talk to anyone other than my immediate family. Food was meaningless and sleep impossible. Tremendous nightmares would come. Some days I felt like I was drowning. Feelings of guilt surfaced no matter how hard we had tried to help Johnny.

How did I survive it?

**1. I leaned on my faith.** My son became psychotic after dabbing high potency marijuana concentrates called wax and shatter. During this immense time of grief, I needed hope, and I found it by leaning on my faith. My belief that I will see Johnny again in heaven gave me the strength to continue on days when I thought I couldn't get out of bed. My faith was my solace.

**2. I put my energy into a cause related to my loved one's death.** I wrote an email to a friend after Johnny died, "I must forge ahead despite my pain and try to give some sort of meaning to losing Johnny." So, this became my mantra. We live in Colorado, where these products are readily available to 18-year-olds who get "med cards" by making up a chronic condition. I use my determination and passion as a source of energy. I started a 501c3 nonprofit, Johnny's Ambassadors, to educate parents and teens about the dangers of today's high-THC marijuana on adolescent brain development, mental illness, and suicide. Helping others has been a great source of comfort and healing for our family. Johnny's death has not been in vain, because sharing his story with others is saving lives.



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**3. I did something creative and new.** I invested my time into creative outlets, such as writing a book, blogging, posting on Facebook, creating an online curriculum to teach teens about the harms of marijuana, giving presentations, and hosting webinars. I drew upon the skills I'd learned in business over the past 30 years. I forced myself out of my fetal position and interacted with others, even when I didn't "feel" like it. Their love reflected back to me and bolstered my energy. Maybe you could write a song. Draw a picture. Take photos of the world around you. Make a scrapbook.

**4. I shut down my negative self-talk, blame, and guilt.** This was easier said than done. I've been told that many parents experience moments of self-doubt, blame and guilt. When this negative self-talk started, I knew I needed to really consider what I was telling myself. I realized we did the best we could, and Johnny's death was not our fault. We could only go so far in trying to keep Johnny safe from his choices. But at some point, his life was out of our hands, and you can't control another human being. We reframed guilt as regret.

**5. I found support groups and built relationships.** My husband and I

were intentional in facing our grief head on and actively sought help. We have met the most incredible people in this journey. We attended a Parents of Children of Suicide meeting just three weeks after Johnny died, followed by a Survivors of Suicide group that met at a hospital, a Griefshare program at a local church (first in person and then online), and weekly couple and individual grief therapy. We developed relationships with other people and organizations who are allies in our missions and purposes. I never would have met the wonderful people now in my life without going through this tragedy. Stay close to your life partner and friends. My husband and I decided we could not get through this without each other. We made this child together and must keep this son—forever 19—with us.

Slowly, in the months that followed Johnny's death, using the techniques above, I started to breathe again, and the nightmares stopped. I still cry nearly every day; however, over a year and a half later as of this writing, I have found joy again and look forward to the future. I have an amazing husband, two incredible surviving children, and wonderful friends. I grieve Johnny deeply, but I'M ALIVE. After surviving that, I know I can survive anything. And I know you can survive it.

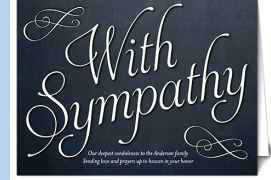
**Laura Stack is the Founder et. CEO of the nonprofit, Johnny's Ambassadors, which she formed after her son, Johnny, died by suicide after becoming psychotic from dabbing high-THC marijuana concentrates. Johnny's Ambassadors now educates parents and teens about the dangers of today's high-THC marijuana on adolescent brain development, mental illness, and suicide. She shares Johnny's warning and marijuana research in her new book, *The Dangerous Truth About Today's Marijuana: Johnny Stack's Life and Death Story*.**





## THE TROUBLE WITH CONDOLENCES

by Carol Smith



"What's the worst thing someone ever said to you?" I've gotten this question so many times in the twenty-seven years since I lost my son Christopher. Newly bereaved parents often asked it in disbelief after well-meaning friends and relatives said exactly the wrong thing at the wrong time. Older griever, like me, sometimes asked it in solidarity when we recognized our common grief.

For me, the answer to that question was: "At least you had him for seven years."

When I heard "at least you had him," the translation in my head was "you're being ungrateful for the seven years you had." What I heard in my head was you're not entitled to be sad because he wasn't supposed to live in the first place or, at the very least, you had seven years to prepare for this.

### **You're never prepared.**

There were other miscues. I sometimes heard variations on this theme: "If I lost my child, it would kill me." What I heard was, if you are still standing, your grief must not be so bad. Intrusive questions were just as hard.

I am not alone in this. Each of us has our own horror stories. They're in a better place; you can have another baby; you're not given more than you can handle. None of these are the comfort they're intended to be. I have said all the wrong things myself to others who are grieving, words I immediately regretted flying out of my mouth.

There are reasons we say these things, even when we should know better.

### **What happened?**

People who ask, "What happened?" are really trying to build a case for why it can't happen to them. Same with its corollary: "Everything happens for a reason." If there's no reason – that's an intolerable thought. What they are really saying is, I can't permit you to grieve because it means I might have to grieve someday too. They're afraid. I understand that. I'm afraid, too.

### **You're so strong.**

When people say, "You're so strong," or some other version meant as a compliment about how well you're "handling it" or how successful you've been at "moving on," they are indirectly admitting their own fear and insecurity that they are not up to the task of consoling you. This makes them feel powerless in a way that also makes them feel vulnerable. It's a weird rationale, but people reach for it. It must have happened to you because you can "handle it."

### **I know just how your feel.**

When people say "I know just how your feel. My (fill in the blank) just died," they are also saying, I don't want this horrible thing that happened to take you away from me. They want their own experience to cleave you to them. They may also be sending up a subconscious flare that the news of your loss has triggered old losses for them as well. They seek comfort from you in the moment you need comfort from them.

It's gotten easier over time to stand back and be able to consider what lies behind the words people say. I no longer get the hot flash of anger when people say the "wrong" thing to me. I try to remember to be grateful people tried, no matter what gets said, and to recognize it takes courage on their part to say something to begin with. The truth is, there is no one right thing to say. What's comforting to one person may not be to another. Not only that – what's comforting one day, may not be the next.

All these years later, I don't remember the exact words people used during the acute stages of my grief, but I do remember their faces and the fact they tried to comfort me when I was most in need.

It's worse to say nothing at all.

Carol Smith is the author of *Crossing the River: Seven Stories That Saved My Life*, a Memoir about coming to terms with the loss of her son Christopher when he was seven. She lives in Seattle where she works as an editor for NPR affiliate Kuow Public Radio.



LOVED & ALWAYS REMEMBERED  
**OUR FEBRUARY CHILDREN**  
 Birthdays



Thomas R. "Tommy" Goldberg	Son	Jean Goldberg
Gregory Ellis Williams	Son	Darrell & Linda Williams
Riley Martin	Son	Peggy & Rodney Martin
Nicole "Colie" Hoffman	Daughter	Sandra Hoffman
Ann Myers	Daughter	Gretchen Wrigley
Edison Ruef	Son	Jennifer & Martin Ruef
Keenan Cozzolino	Son	Natalie & Chris Dunigan
Amanda Dare Clifton	Daughter	Doug & Debbie Clifton
Jack Roberts	Son	Carolyn & David Roberts
Jeff Miller	Son	Carol Shelton
Olivia Menard	Daughter	Jen & Chad Menard
Brandon Lewis	Son	Marty & Paula Lewis
Julie Kesner	Daughter	Joan Schmidt
Sarah Glesner	Daughter	Kathleen & Kevin Combs
Keith F Larson II (Kip)	Son	Keith & Mary Ann Larson
Corinne Greenslade	Daughter	Marie & George Greenslade
Stephen Greenslade	Son	Marie & George Greenslade
Nick Wallace	Son	Greg & Dora Wallace
Garrilyn J.I. Horton	Daughter	Shewan Lynette Horton
Meredith Elisabeth Edwards	Daughter	Beth Eastman-Mull
Suzanne Ridgill	Daughter	Pete & Kathy Montague
Luke Johnston	Son	Susan & David Johnston
Amark Patra	Son	Shuva Patra
William Bunn	Son	Mark & Amy Bunn
Scott Shorter	Son	Jeanne & Ken Shorter
Cameron Wagner	Son	David & Cindy Wagner
Zachary McNeill	Son	Penny McNeill
Halo Patton-Degraffenreaidt	Daughter	Nijah Patton & Robert Degraffenreaidt
Alexander "Lex" Luster	Son	Maria & Anthony Luster
Tyron James Harris	Son	Jim & Bonnie Harris



**SNOWFLAKES**  
 by Denise Falzone



Every snowflake that falls is unique and has its own individual design. There are beautiful patterns in each snowflake and even the tiniest of flakes have their own markings. These patterns change again and again – even after the flake touches the ground. Each snowflake is a cause for wonder, each flake is one of a kind. No two are exactly alike.

Like the snowflake, our beautiful children were each unique and special; some we only dreamed about and some danced upon the earth. They filled our lives with wonder and transformed our world. We held them too briefly, but we will hold them in our hearts forever. We shall remember them always.

At this time of remembering, it may help to reflect upon how our lives have been enriched by the love we have given and the love we have received from our children. Our children leave treasures behind that time can never take away.



LOVED & ALWAYS REMEMBERED  
OUR FEBRUARY CHILDREN  
Anniversaries



Michael Mendy	Son	Kathleen & Mike Mendy
Stephen Zombek	Son	Marguerite Zombek
Daniel Paul Wisler	Son	Alice Wisler
Dylan Raitz	Son	Marie & Bill Raitz
Robert Dower	Son	John & Barbara Dower
Tiffany Pemberton	Daughter	Angie & Greg Selvia
Kevin Phillips	Son	Dee & Chiccola Bell-Phillips
Kim Moreno Thomas	Daughter	Judy Moreno
Nick Wallace	Son	Greg & Dora Wallace
Glenn Vick	Son	Sue & Melvin Vick
Michael Assaff	Son	Janet & Mark Anderton
Christian Williams	Son	Charlene & Milton Peacock
Lawrence (Larz) Skelson	Son	Larry Skelson
Rylan Buchanan	Son	Sarah Galperin
Julie Elizabeth McClelland	Daughter	Dru McClelland Smith
Riley Martin	Son	Peggy & Rodney Martin
Shreya Rastogi	Daughter	Sudhir Rustogi & Neerja Rastogi
Devin Grose	Grandson	Michael & Cecelia McCarron
Bedie Joseph	Son	Mike & Kate Joseph
Corinne Greenslade	Daughter	Marie & George Greenslade
Pamela Jenks McAteer	Daughter	Carolyn Nelson
Addison Tompkins	Daughter	Wanda Tompkins & Ron Trombley
Caroline Allen	Daughter	Betsy & Alex Allen
Abigail "Abby" Cox	Daughter	Betsy Whaley
Josiah Pickett	Son	Ashley & Cedric Pickett
Davis Peacock	Son	Kim Hasty
Javan Stewart	Son	Ursula Seda & Omarr Stewart
Danny Noonan	Son	Timothy Noonan
Adam T. Morgan	Son	Cindy Morgan
Malcolm Baldwin	Son	Kimberly & Daniel Baldwin
Skyler McCardle	Daughter	Melissa & Brent McCardle
Will Day	Son	Beth & William Day
Halo Patton-Degraffenreadt	Daughter	Nijah Patton & Robert Degraffenreadt
Jeffrey Schneider	Son	Vince & Judy Schneider
Dana Elizabeth Rabeler	Daughter	Lawton & Valerie Rabeler
Zachary Michael Arata	Son	Mike & Karen Arata
Charles Williams	Son	Kay Scott
Andre Eric Houseman, Jr.	Son	Sharon Houseman

Deep in winter, my friend, when life is darkest  
It is very important to try thinking  
One small sunshine thought –  
Every morning, early – Try your best.

Sascha Wagner



# *The Compassionate Friends*

*Wake County Chapter*  
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

**The Compassionate Friends, Inc.  
Wake County Chapter  
PO Box 6602  
Raleigh, NC 27628-6602**



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**THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, INC.  
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PO Box 6602  
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