

THE PARENT

january - march 2014

Journey

a griefHaven newsletter for grieving parents and those who support them

why i wrote a flower for hope

by michael woodford

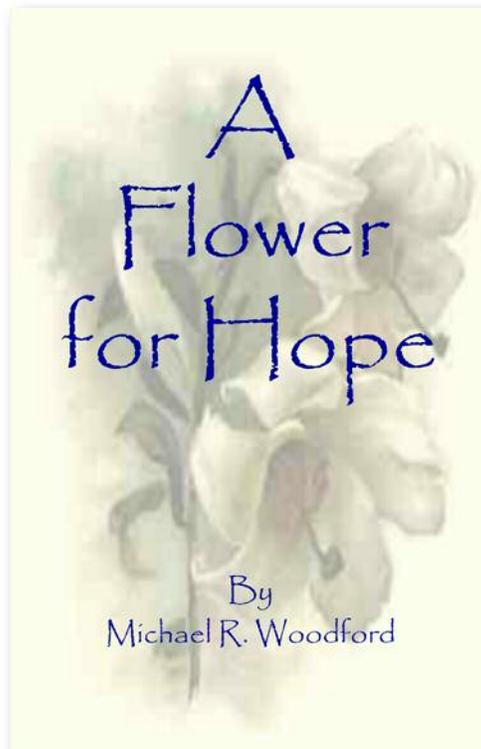
June 13, 1991, dawned clear and bright. It was one of those days that sparkled more with the late March promise of spring than the normal hot and humid summer days so common in the nation's capital. However, my wife Kay Lynn and I hardly noticed as we silently made our way through the doors of the Georgetown University Hospital located in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. That cloudless Thursday was the day that we would witness our son's death as life support was discontinued. Little did I know that this surreal and exquisitely painful day was the harbinger of other days to come.

It was only six short months earlier that, having completed graduate school, we had moved our small family from the Tidewater area of Southern Virginia to the frenetic and exciting environs of Washington, D.C. to begin a new job. Kay was pregnant with our fourth child and was due the middle of April. Life was good.

Less than five weeks later, Kay began to have signs of premature labor, along with some other complications that required her to be admitted to the hospital and put on strictly monitored bed rest. All of the tests and scans showed a perfectly healthy baby who just seemed anxious to arrive.

Three weeks later (and six weeks premature) on February 26, our son Andrew Marcus was

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Is it just me, or do the rest of you also feel that 2013 flew by? They say, as you get older, time moves more quickly, so I guess that is the answer for me.

So here we are...facing another year. Are you just beginning your journey? Are you at a place where you are feeling more hopeful? Wherever you are, we are here for you.

In this issue, I know you will be as utterly moved and inspired as we were by Michael Woodford's unbelievable journey and the beautiful book he has written, *A Flower for Hope*, where he shares what goes on behind those closed doors of grieving parents. His hope is that everyone will gain a greater sense of compassion and understanding as they read. And thanks to Nancy Kandal for the beautiful and sometimes haunting poetry in her book, *There Is No Goodbye*, that was inspired by Joshua's death.

As I prepare for my big trip as the keynote speaker and workshop leader in Atlanta, GA for the CURE Childhood Cancer Organization, I am reminded at how much need there is in this world for a simple gesture of love and hope.

~ Susan Whitmore
founder & president



born. He spent the first few weeks in an incubator with a feeding tube. Kay spent every waking moment she could with him until he was able to gain weight, thermo-regulate, and finally come home. It was a wonderful homecoming, and we were all finally under the same roof again, safe and sound.

Near the end of May, Andrew appeared to have caught a bug which did not let go. He ended up in Fairfax Hospital, and the next few days were filled with tests and scans and procedures, but no diagnosis. Andrew continued to decline to the point where he was put on a respirator and an induced coma. The doctors were perplexed. Andrew was transported to Georgetown University Hospital, and the testing began again with no progress. All the while Andrew continued to decline. One final test was determined to be able to reveal the problem. We waited anxiously for the outcome so a treatment could be outlined and our son start back on the road to health. What we didn't expect, even in our wildest dreams, was the pediatric cardiology team telling us that our son had a very rare congenital heart/lung condition that had no treatment and was 100% fatal...and we would have to decide when to turn off life support.

The next morning was that sparkling morning in the spring of 1991. Kay held our son, whispering in his ear for a short time, and then changed places with me. I held him

close, afraid to breathe. Hesitantly I nodded to the doctor, and life support was discontinued. Shortly I felt him slip away as the heart monitor slowed and then stopped. I put down his small body, and together Kay and I stood next to the large window looking out on the beautiful spring-like day, wondering why the world had not stopped

and the black heavy clouds had not filled the heavens, raining down tears with us.

Four days later we buried our little boy and returned home to a world that expected us to jump right back into the business of living. We had three children who needed us, but we could barely take care of ourselves. We struggled together and individually. We focused on the other children and worked through the unexpected, and often confusing, manifestations of their grief. It took a long time, but the good days slowly became more frequent and the bad days less so.

Three and a half years later, we found out that we were expecting again. The pregnancy went normally with no issues or complications. In 1994, the day after

Christmas, Brittany Marie was born.

During a family vacation in Yellowstone in August of 1995, we noticed that Brittany appeared to be struggling with the thinner air at higher altitudes, as we had come from sea level to the mountains of Montana and Wyoming. Ten days later, while on a



Andrew

business trip in Africa, I received a phone call from my wife telling me to come home...our daughter was dying. After nearly forty hours in transit, I was sitting in the office of the Chief of Pediatric Cardiology at Primary Children's Hospital in Salt Lake City. He explained to me that (against all science and odds) our daughter was suffering with the same condition that had killed our son four years earlier. Brittany was already on oxygen, and the decline had begun. We were devastated! We could not do this again...at least not do it and continue living ourselves.

After some frantic investigation that revealed there had been progress in treating this rare condition, we found ourselves at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). Brittany was tested, admitted, and placed at the top of the transplant list. Now we only had to keep her alive until transplant organs became available.

The most difficult issue with our situation at that point was not necessarily that our daughter was in the hospital. The problem was that we knew exactly what would happen to us if she died. Worse was the fact that we now had to hope that some other parents would suffer the same grief and pain that we had gone through during the past four years in order for our daughter to have a chance at living. It was a horrible dichotomy of hope that our daughter could be cured, overshadowed by guilt for wishing death on

"I want to let others who have loved and lost a child know that there is hope, and they are not alone. Their experiences are understood and shared by others who can look them in the eye and truly say, 'I understand how you feel.'"

another child and that other parents suffer the trauma of loss.

It was not long before Brittany declined to the point of having to be on full life support (with the attendant risks), and we watched as her body slowly died around her while her blood and breath were kept circulating mechanically. The morning of Monday,



Andresa, Brittany, and Melanie

September 18, Kay again whispered into her child's ear in a private and final communication between a mother and her child. I then held my daughter's small body close while life support was discontinued... and the journey along the path of grief and loss that we had so painfully trod before began anew.

We all struggled. It didn't help that we knew what it would be like and knew what would be coming. The following April I discovered that Kay had a suicide plan, and I had to have her placed under psychiatric care for a few weeks. Afterward she seemed to be more focused and active in working through her grief.

In April of 1999, I had left on a business trip. While I was out of town, the family was going to drive to Denver to visit some friends. After a long international flight, I got the message that there had been an accident on the way to Denver and my wife had been killed, but the three children who were with her, although injured, were alive.

And so we began the task of putting our lives back together...yet again. We talked a

lot, cried often, and remembered together as we struggled to get through the bad days. We had angels in the form of family, friends, and neighbors who did not abandon us. Time passed, and we were slowly able to participate in living again. Remarriage and expanding our family has brought light again.

I had been waiting to write the book *A Flower for Hope* since shortly after the death of Andrew in 1991. However, most of the story came together after Brittany's death in 1995. I had it outlined, but for the next two years I hesitated to put down the words. It was still too personal and painful at the time. After my wife passed away in 1999, I realized it could not be put off any longer. Most of the

writing happened in 2001, when I self-published the story *Serenity of the Lily* as a fictional account that intertwined experiences of both our children's deaths, along with experiences of others who we had known over the years who had loved and lost a child.

Twelve years, and a lifetime later, I pulled out the old manuscript and put the finishing touches on it. In the intervening years, I have had the opportunity to talk with and open my heart to many who have had to travel a similar road. I have learned new things along the way and have discovered that hope shows up in the most unexpected places. It is amazing that, even though each person's journey is different, there are many of the same landmarks along the way, similarities that, when revealed, show we have journeyed down the same road and experienced many of the same potholes, rest stops, breakdowns, and surprising vistas. I have been able to add some of the unique, as well as shared, experiences into the final book.

A few years after my wife died, my son was very concerned that he would forget important things about his mother. I believe it is a natural

fear for many who often remember the event but cannot recall many of the little things that made our loved ones individuals. For me, writing this story helps keep the memories of my children and wife alive. I can talk and interact with them again; it is an act of love and remembrance, along with good therapy.

However, I wrote this story with two specific purposes in mind. First, many friends and family do not know or understand what goes on behind the closed doors of those who are bereft. These wonderful people are often at a loss and sometimes distance themselves and refuse to interact with loved ones who have gone through the one thing that they, as parents, fear the most. I felt that an intimate glimpse behind those closed doors would help them to understand, in some small measure, how lives can be affected by tragedy. My hope is that in knowing they can be better friends and supporting hands to those they love and care about but cannot identify with. Second, I want to let others who have loved and lost a child know that there is hope, and that they are not alone.

Their experiences are understood and shared by others who can look them in the eye and truly say, "I understand how you feel." I firmly believe

that, if the bonds of love between a parent and child were not so strong, we would not feel so much pain, but the evidence of such exquisite pain says that love and life must have the power to endure beyond what our mortal eyes can see.



Michael Woodford

Michael's book can be ordered in both Kindle format and hard copy on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com), as well as the [griefHaven](https://www.griefHaven.org) website.

*there is no goodbye:
living with the loss of a child*

a book of poetry by nancy kandal

Your pain engulfs me

Strangles me

Tears me to pieces

Where you once lived

I wait for you on a corner in my mind

You never show up in time

The curb is crumbling under my feet

I'm afraid I'll blow away

The sad desperate feeling comes

Without warning or invitation

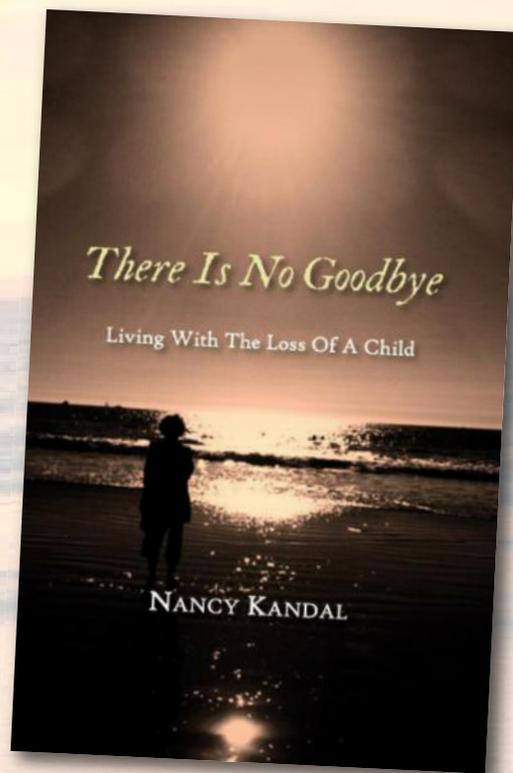
Takes me down

I know you are not coming back

I don't blame you

I'm just so utterly sorry

You had to leave



I would have given my life to save you

I'm not inspired to do anything

Today I'm just stuck in grief

Don't want to talk to anyone

Or see anyone

I don't know whether to put more pictures of you out

Or put away the ones I have out

I don't know what to do

Everyone has ideas about what I should do

How can I explain my son is gone forever

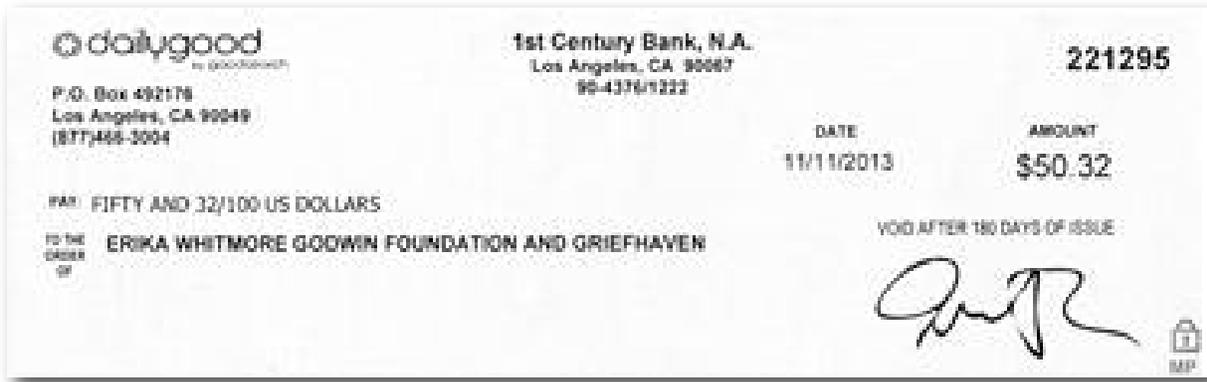
And there is nothing I can do



Josh and Nancy

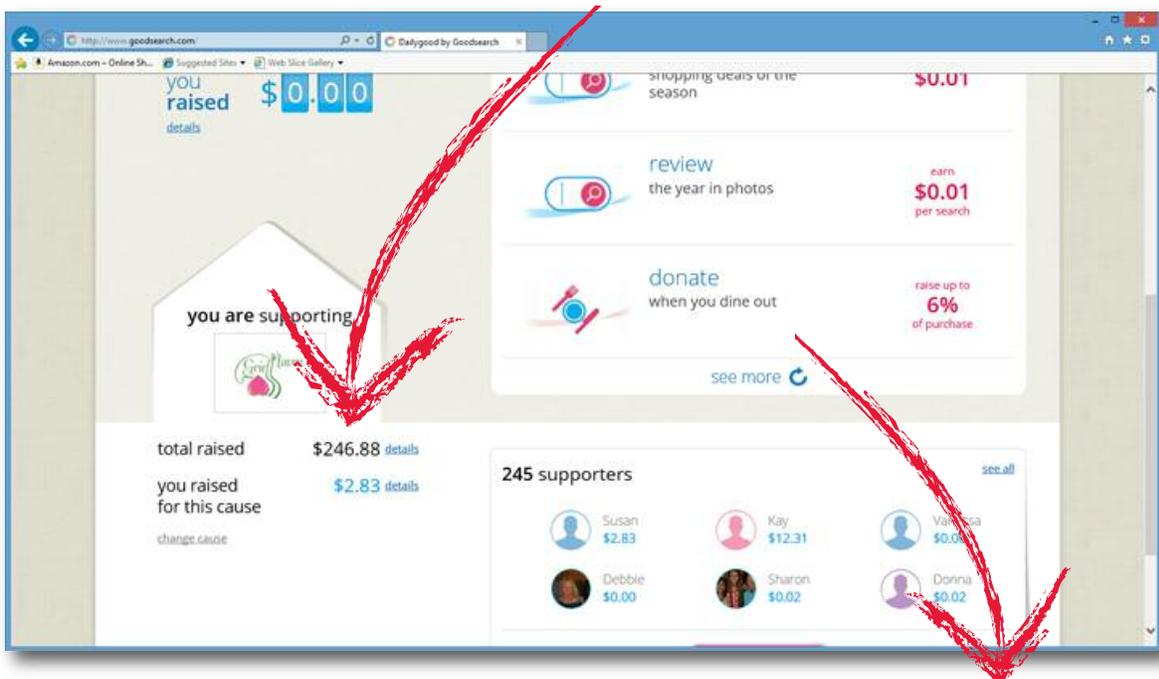
Nancy Kandal lives in Pacific Palisades, California, with her husband, Rudy Hornish, their dog Pookie, and cat Litu. Nancy's son, Josh Kandal, took his own life in December 2010. It was Josh's death that inspired all of the poems in her book. You may order *There Is No Goodbye* at [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com) or through the [griefHaven](https://www.griefHaven.org) website.

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