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PEOPLE

For Mother's Day: How to treat the mothers who have lost their children

BY SOSHA LEWIS

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Meg McElwain's voice caught me off guard. It is deeply and melodically Southern and peppered with big, open laughs. A smile spreads across your face when you listen to her and you feel compelled to use your best manners when you speak to her. I have a feeling that she has blessed many hearts.

Meg and I talked on the phone a few days ago. Thirty seconds into our conversation she referenced her deep Christian faith. I worried that maybe I, an agnostic with a deep abiding love of vodka sodas, hip hop and the "f" word, couldn't do Meg and her passion for Mitchell's Fund justice.

[Mitchell's Fund](#), under the Novant Health Foundation, was founded by Meg in 2012 while her son, Mitchell, was being treated for pediatric cancer. The fund supports families navigating a challenging pediatric diagnosis.

Surely, we were as different as two people get. Yet, that voice. That voice was like a lilting Mississippi siren's song.

Meg and I are about the same age, we both moved to Charlotte right after we graduated from football-centric universities, her son Frank and my daughter Conley are about the same age and attend elementary schools just minutes from each other and we are both proponents of hand written thank you notes. We are both motherless mothers and we both lost our mothers before our children were born.

We agreed that losing the person who brought you into the world, even if you have a complex relationship like my mom and I did, is profound and lonely. Even if you are being celebrated on Mother's Day, the day is tinged with sadness because you don't get to share it with your mom.

However, burying our parents is a natural progression; it's how it is supposed to be. Losing a child is the exact opposite of this; it is the most unnatural experience in the world.

And how do we comfort those who have experienced the greatest loss of all? Well, most of us just don't speak of it. And, Meg says, in the nicest way possible, that that nonsense needs to stop. Like, yesterday.

While Meg knows that every person and situation is different, she found that specific approaches by other people helped her when dealing with Mitchell's illness, treatments and passing.

So, with Mother's Day approaching, here's how to treat the mothers who have lost their children:

HAVE MERCY

At some point during the diagnosis and treatment of a sick child, the parents are going to break and completely freak out. If you witness the freak out and/or are the person they freak out on, just have mercy on them.

BE UNDERSTANDING

Meg and her family were blown away by friends and church members who sent supportive cards and emails and those that stopped by the hospital. However, as they focused on keeping their son alive it could be overwhelming. She stressed that it was never personal if she didn't respond, she just didn't have the time or energy.

BE PRACTICAL

Although gift cards for a day of pampering are great in theory, families with a sick child will benefit greatly from cards from practical merchants such as grocery stores, Target, Walmart and Amazon.

TALK

Talk about the child. They are not forgotten. They are not taboo. Talking about the child makes them part of the "everyday" and help keeps his or her memory alive. On Mother's Day, Meg will visit Mitchell's grave. She knows that there is no way to prepare herself for the emotions that she will feel, as they vary from time to time. She knows that she will be filled with humbleness because God chose her to be Mitchell's mom.

And, on Mother's Day, as tradition warrants, I will gladly eat whatever totally gross breakfast in bed my daughter brings me and be filled with humbleness that I get to be her mom, and that moms like Meg McElwain exist.

Learn more about Mitchell's Fund [here](#). Follow Mitchell's Fund on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

Photo: [Flashes of Hope](#)

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