

## “Life is Worth Living, Even if It is Painful and Short”

Nancy Valko, January 6, 2019

I was greatly moved by a December 21, 2018 op-ed in the Wall Street Journal by Gayle Somers titled [“Life Is Worth Living, Even if It Is Painful and Short”](#) with the subtitle “My son’s addiction caused great suffering and ended with a fatal overdose. I’ve never regretted his birth”

In this op-ed, Ms. Somers told the story of her son’s birth and eventual death 33 years later from an accidental overdose after a 14 year battle with drug addiction. That resonated with me since [I lost my 30 year old daughter Marie to suicide](#) using an assisted suicide technique after a 16 year battle with addiction.

But it was Ms. Somers’ wonderful statement “I’ve never regretted his birth” that caused me to write a [letter to the editor](#) that was published today:

“As someone who has lost a daughter to suicide and has also lost another daughter and a grandson to medical conditions, I really appreciate and agree with Gayle Somers’ op-ed “Life is Worth Living, Even if it is Painful and Short” (Dec. 22). My first daughter died at 30 after struggling with substance abuse for 16 years.

As a nurse and friend of bereaved parents, I also have never met a parent or grandparent who regretted the birth of his or her lost child.

I once was asked for advice by a bereaved mother after her 2-year-old son with Down Syndrome died unexpectedly. She wanted to know what might help her accept her son’s death with a hopeful outlook. From my own personal experience, I told her that solace comes when a lost child’s life rather than his death becomes the most important fact about him. The love itself never dies.

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### CELEBRATING LIFE

Ms. Somers also wrote in her op-ed that:

“These days pregnant women can take prenatal tests to learn about genetic defects their babies may have. Sometimes I’m grateful that no test allows you to see how a child’s life will unfold. All parents instinctively shrink from the

excruciating expectation of a child’s suffering and, inevitably, their own suffering.

Some parents are so frightened at the prospect of raising a child with a genetic abnormality that they end the child’s life in the womb. While I understand this temptation—to spare the child the struggle, to spare yourself the pain—reflecting on the time I spent with my son convinced me that life is worth it despite the suffering.”

This also resonated with me since I lost my 5 1/2 month old daughter Karen who had Down Syndrome and a severe heart defect just before her scheduled surgery in 1983.

Two years later, I was pregnant again and the doctor strongly urged me to have an amniocentesis to test for Down Syndrome. I refused not only because of the unnecessary risk to the baby but also because I knew I would love this baby regardless of any condition or lifespan. Because of Karen, I was not afraid to welcome this baby.

Happily, my daughter Joy was born healthy and now has a baby daughter of her own to share with us.

### CONCLUSION

Over the years, I’ve been inspired by many parents who have lost children of all ages. Some of these children died of natural causes and some from medical malpractice, tragic accidents, suicide and even murder.

The pain of losing a child is naturally devastating, especially at first. However, I have seen those same parents also rise up and honor those children’s lives by helping others or fighting injustices.

I consider Ms. Somers one of those inspiring parents, especially how she ended her op-ed by writing:

“Even knowing what we know now about how our children’s lives would end, all of us would choose life, no matter how short, no matter how painful. We welcomed our children into our families. We gave them names, and then, one day, we began to learn how to do what all parents must do—love without limits, comfort during the pain, not shrink from the suffering, give thanks for the gifts our children are to us.”

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