

## WFWP USA: Forever Life - A Gentle Guide for Grieving Hearts - Young and Old

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On my very first day serving as a chaplain, I was assigned to a hospital hospice unit to shadow a more experienced chaplain. Without hesitation, my mentor guided me into a quiet room where an older woman lay in her final moments of life. Her breathing was labored, accompanied by what is known as the "death rattle." Her mouth hung open, her eyes unfocused, yet straining toward something just beyond this world.

My mentor encouraged me to step forward and engage, gently coaching me to interact under her watchful eye. With great care, I placed my hand softly on the woman's arm. "Relax," I whispered. "Breathe... relax and breathe." As if she had been waiting for permission, she began to follow the rhythm of my words. "Just keep going forward. Relax and breathe... breathe... breathe..." And then, quite peacefully, she took her last breath.

That experience left a lasting impression on me. In that quiet hospital room, I realized I was witnessing something sacred - ushering a soul from this life to the next. If I had not chosen the path of spiritual care, I often think I might have become a midwife. In many ways, that day I served as a midwife of another kind - one who helps birth a soul into eternal life.

Twelve years later, I found myself once again speaking those same tender words - this time to my beloved daughter-in-law, Victoria. She was only 38 years old, the mother of my two young grandchildren (ages 2 and 4), and the cherished wife of my son. After a courageous five-year battle with an aggressive breast cancer, Vicky was preparing to transition from this life. As I sat by her side, I encouraged her gently as I had done years earlier: "Relax... breathe... just keep moving forward."

After her passing, Vicky's mother asked me to officiate the funeral and speak about the concept of "our three lives," something I had shared with her previously, and which had brought her a measure of peace. Over the years, I've spoken about these "three lives" during moments of grief and transition - it's a simple but comforting framework that helps make sense of the mystery of life and death.

When we returned home from the funeral, I overheard my four-year-old grandson asking innocent but deep questions, the kind only a grieving child can ask. He mentioned how Daddy sometimes cried, and he asked where Mommy was now. That honest and heartfelt conversation, paired with the idea of our "three lives," became the inspiration for a children's book.

To be honest, I don't even recall writing the book. I only remember holding the completed manuscript in my hands and feeling a wave of peace. Perhaps it was divinely inspired. While beliefs about the afterlife vary, Forever Life offers a hopeful perspective to readers of all ages.

I am deeply honored to announce the release of Forever Life, a gentle and heartfelt book created to help children - and the adults who love them - navigate the painful journey of grief.

This book speaks directly to children ages 4 - 12, but it has resonated just as strongly with adults. Whether the loss is of a parent, grandparent, sibling, or friend, Forever Life offers an honest, age-appropriate explanation that opens the door to healing conversations.

Beautifully illustrated by rising Nutley children's book illustrator Anais St. Amant, the artwork perfectly complements the text. Anais sensitively portrays the concepts of life in the womb, the importance of nurturing unconditional love in daily life, and the reality of the afterlife.

More than a story about loss, this book is a celebration of life and eternal love. It provides comfort, fosters understanding, and encourages emotional growth during one of life's most difficult times.

Forever Life is a valuable resource for:

Parents navigating grief with young children

Counselors and therapists working with grieving families

Teachers and caregivers seeking tools for support

Clergy and grief professionals offering spiritual guidance