FIRSTLIGHT NEWSLETTER

Perhaps, just perhaps . . . your loved one's legacy will be in teaching you how to live again, to love anew.

Nick Rhodes, Matters of a Man's Heart

MESSAGE FROM FIRSTLIGHT CEO

Dear friends and supporters of FirstLight,

We continue to see through our work the societal pressure on Dads following a loss. Many bereaved Dads feel they must hold their family together. They wear a mask, maintain a stiff upper lip, tell us they're fine LIFE BEYOND when they're not, while in truth, they are as confused, heartbroken and suffering as much as mothers do. They are so often the forgotten grievers. Bereaved Moms generally receive the most attention, and we regularly check in on them.

If there's a man in your life dealing with child loss, Nick Rhodes, in his article on Grief and Life Beyond Child Loss included in this Newsletter, asks us to "please check in on him often". He goes on to say, "I agree that a mother-child bond is unique and should be addressed first. But consider that with (some) men, that he's probably moved on from some friends along the way, only having his career, family, and wife's friends in his life. In a nutshell, he might not have as many open arms in front of him. So, after you give WALK Mom a hug, please turn around and wrap those arms around Dad too". Nick Rhodes's experience and his SUPPORTING discussion on grief will, I'm sure, offer comfort and encouragement to many reading his article.

We have again selected Father's Day (June 18th this year) for FirstLight's annual Mile in Memory remembrance walks as we want to shine a light on Dads dealing with child loss and afford the opportunity through the remembrance walks for their families and friends to wrap their arms around them, acknowledge their need to grieve and support them on their grief journey.

We look forward to hearing about your Mile in Memory plans and subsequently sharing photos capturing your experiences on the day.

Our heartfelt thanks to all who have, through their support, enabled FirstLight to help so many families over 6 PAGE the last 47 years.

As demand for FirstLight's services continues to grow, we are keen to continue to expand our capacity to support the enlarged FirstLight family. If you think you would like to do something to help but are not quite sure how, please take a look at some of the ideas we have outlined in this Newsletter, and we will work with you to bring your efforts to fruition. Every amount, no matter how small, helps us to provide support services to families who experience the unimaginable pain of the loss of their child.

With sincere thanks and warm regards, Fionnuala Sheehan. CEO, FirstLight

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Grief and Life Beyond Child Loss: A Father's Words



By Nick Rhodes, Matters of a Mans Heart

Sophia passed away in my arms on October 4th, 2011. Barely a year earlier, Rachel and I were exchanging vows on our wedding day . . . already having our lives mapped out. But three months later, on Valentine's Day, we joyfully learned that our lives would change forever. There we sat, after dinner, in front of Walgreens, staring at a positive pregnancy test. As off guard as we were caught by this new direction, we embraced jumping into the driver's seat of would-be parents.

Unfortunately, the honeymoon period of pregnancy – and marriage – was over before it had begun. On the day set aside to reveal the sex of our new baby, we learned that our first child had developed a defect known as an omphalocele. (This abnormality occurs in utero when a fetus' abdominal wall doesn't fully close and certain organs protrude into the umbilical cord). In a matter of moments, our world was flipped upside down . . . only to be followed by the bittersweet words, "It's a girl!" In the following weeks, we'd toggle the emotional rollercoasters of hope and sorrow. Doctors and decisions came and went with every sunrise. On days we didn't sit through appointments, we'd pace our condo in anticipation of answers – ones that never came.

Ultimately, we relocated our entire lives from Norfolk to Philadelphia to seek the best-known care we could find. Rachel and I resided at the Ronald McDonald House of Philadelphia while we focused our attention towards Sophia at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP).

Our spirits were high after having Sophia at thirty-two weeks via complicated C-section. Despite our prayers and best efforts, however, Sophia would live the entirety of her life in the CHOP NICU. Her health declined soon after birth, and after five and a half weeks, we were faced with the unimaginable decision of letting our first child pass on.

She died six days before our first wedding anniversary.

I know that I'm writing these words to a broad audience. Not all will relate to the details above – particularly those of understanding an omphalocele. Some readers may be coping with a recent loss, some long ago. Some may be dealing with the uncertainty of pregnancy complications; others have already stared down multiple miscarriages. And I imagine many families are fighting to become pregnant or to financially afford the options to conceive or adopt among others.

Reciprocally, I also know I can't relate to all the examples above; and that I may even be further detached from understanding simply because I'm a man. I know this much just from our circumstances, in how my wife and I coped differently with our pregnancy, challenges, and Sophia's death. Emotionally, my journey as a father began the moment we found out we were pregnant. Rachel's began years before – in her mind, longing to be a mother. So, I won't try and pretend that I understand everyone's story, and I won't attempt to be an authority on child loss.

But, regardless of each reader's reason for being here, there is something I know a few things about; the thing that ties the heartbroken threads of our uncommon bonds together. It's difficult to convey our experience in a single post, but I do believe discussing grief could offer comfort to those living within a season of sorrow. Wherever you are in your journey – whenever your loss occurred – I pray my words encourage you to joyfully seek a new chapter; one abundant in happiness.

Grief, in general...

If nothing else, please understand this... you have every right to feel the way you feel. Losing a child will be one of the most difficult hits you will ever experience. It's not normal, so it's completely okay not to be okay. Even as you regain a little bit of your old self, you can expect to "fall off the wagon" time and time again.

Seven years after losing her, we still have "Sophia Days" – days where random memories cause all hell to break loose in our hearts and minds. It can be the song we played when she passed away or visiting a restaurant nearby the hospital. Whatever it is, it can shut us down for a day, and I have to believe others have these days too.

Please know these days will come and go in your life. They're the sadly emotional yet, necessary side of recovery, and I encourage you to embrace them and live in your memories of your loved one. These are the days for the ugly cries that help cleanse your heart; days where you'll rebuild your life one stepping stone of grief at a time. Please don't run from them. For us, "Sophia Days" are always difficult. Yet, the following days are also always the most peaceful.

This may not be easy to understand initially, but I ask you to (eventually) face down your grief. Know that it's healthy; that you are entitled to feeling the way you do as often or as long as you need. Grief is a bittersweet double-edged sword. It's painfully difficult to live with, but it's also what helps heals a broken heart.

As the other parent...

It's fair to say (from my experience) that the mother usually receives most of the attention following a loss. Dad is likely sitting on the sidelines, living in his head, trying to figure out whatever it is men try and figure out. We want to be there for our bride, check the boxes of "normal" life, and hold the wall up before the rest of our world collapses too. Truthfully, we're just broken men trying to understand the "why us" part of all this. We're great at wearing our masks, but we're as confused, hurt, and heartbroken as Mom. Losing a child is the hardest thing we've ever dealt with too, no matter how many times we grumble that "we're fine."

If there's a man in your life dealing with this loss, please check in on him often. I agree that a mother-child bond is unique and should be addressed first. But consider that with (some) men, that he's probably moved on from some friends along the way, only having his career, family, and wife's friends in his life. In a nutshell, he might not have as many open arms in front of him. So, after you give Mom a hug, please turn around and wrap those arms around Dad too.

As a father...

Hey, tough guy! Stop holding up that wall and let go of that "men don't cry" nonsense. We've reached out to numerous people over the years that have lost children. In every instance, only the wife engages. Her response to my offer to talk to her husband every single time – ... "oh, he says he's fine."

In the politest way, that's complete crap! I know you want to carry the world on your back, but this is where I remind you that it's completely okay to acknowledge your heartache and pain. You lost a child, so that macho pride that works in the boardroom or the gym doesn't apply here. You need to stare this down for your own well-being and sanity. I went down a dark road of depression and alcoholism after Sophia died – just me, a bottle, and my thoughts. Trust me that you can not walk through this on your own, in your own mind.

For the sake of your family – you must experience grief in its purest form. You have got to talk it out; cry it out with loved ones or professionals. Your wife is grieving your child too. Don't let her grieve the emotional loss of a person she still has in her life.

Being mature in your masculinity has everything to do with knowing when to let your emotional guard down and being vulnerable. Being a man is knowing when to soften up. If someone invites you to lunch or offers you a hug, take it!

In marriage...

Loss changes who we are forever. Likewise, it can change a marriage forever too. That beautiful vision you had about your future on your wedding day is going to be hiding out behind the clouds of this storm for a while. It's important for y'all to understand that you're going to have to take turns holding the umbrella.

Just as important as letting yourself grieve, you must understand that your spouse is in mourning too. It's critical that you understand that your spouse will grieve differently than you. Love them and let them be . . . and never ever make them feel guilty about their grief!

You must go into grieving knowing that your spouse might not be able to tend to your needs. My wife's love language is Personal Touch while I'm as hands-off introvert as they come. My wife needs the comfort of company. I need a walk in the woods. She prays aloud while driving with the radio on. I seek solitude in a dark room with prayers reduced to whispers.

As okay as it is to grieve, it's equally okay to do so on your own terms, in your own style. There is no copy and paste way to overcome a loss. Once you learn to make it your own, the sooner you can get back to life. The sooner you realize that your spouse is facing this in a way unique to them, the sooner you can assure that your marriage will not only survive, but be reinforced by your compassion and empathy for one another.

Not your identity...

I say this with a sincere (perhaps tough love) tone: do not let your grief or the loss of your loved one consume you. If it lights a fire under you to write a book, raise awareness, or start a charity, then by all means, fuel the fire of your child's legacy. But, if years later, you're still devastated from losing your loved one, please let me encourage you to resume living.

You are worth so much more than residing in a state of tragedy. This world is too beautiful to simply pass through. You have an opportunity to do what your loved one can no longer do and I don't mean just functioning and breathing. You owe it to yourself to recover; to dream; to love. You owe it to those who aren't able to live to go out and live a life worth living.

We owed our recovering to Sophia as you owe your lost loved one. But most importantly, you owe it to you. It's okay to take as long as you need, but you cannot give up living because your loved one is gone.

Grief is what you feel, not who you are.

Love them always...

There's good news in the entirety of this grieving process. Days become easier. A sense of self is regained. Eventually, normal gets pretty close to normal again.

I said above that you should move on, but know that you can also flourish without forgetting. Moving on doesn't mean leaving everything behind. You will always be entitled to cherish their memories; to ugly cry when a song plays on the radio. You can remember, sob, laugh, and love them until the end of all your days. For every day that the sun rises, love them.

Love them forever . . . love them always. But not without hope...

I don't know that recovery is possible without taking control of your daily struggles and learning to love and give of yourself again. It takes effort; fueled by hope.

Keep your sights set on better days. Believe that you are deserving. You can't accept better tomorrows if you don't believe you deserve it. You can't prepare for them if your heart is lost among yesterdays.

My wife and I buried our heads in the sand for a year before trying to have more children. We felt it was an adequate amount of time to give ourselves, yet, to also honor Sophia without rushing to move on. In that year, we focused on one another and let "Sophia Days" come as they may. Know that when I speak of hope, and learning to live again, I pour my heart out to you because while we've experienced the worst of life, I believe we now experience the very best.

Not only have we learned to live with our loss, we've also been blessed with three more little girls. As a father, I know that I love those little girls more because of the one I've lost. In grieving, yet, hoping for better days, we've now flourished in having a bigger (healthier) family than we could've ever imagined after Sophia died.

Grief hurt for a while, but after long, we found normal again. And truthfully, the new normal is somewhat better with deeper perspective, vision, gratitude, and love for my life and family.

For me, that's Sophia's legacy . . . that she taught me how to be a father to her little sisters.

I ask you the same my friend. Regardless of how closely you relate to my circumstances, what will your loved one's legacy be?

Perhaps, just perhaps . . . your loved one's legacy will be in teaching you how to live again; to love anew.



About Nick Rhodes

Nick Rhodes is an "all things adversity" blogger on his site, Matters of a Man's Heart. He uses much of his own life experience to help guide others through related circumstances - whether it be overcoming addiction, mental illness, child loss, and even incarceration.

He also blogs his perspective on his greatest passions; faith, family, overcoming day-to-day adversity, and accomplishing life goals.

The Mile In Memory Walk supporting suddenly bereaved families across Ireland



The 2023 Mile in Memory Remembrance Walk will again be held on Father's Day which takes place on Sunday, June 18th. This date has been selected so as to focus attention on the role of bereaved fathers within the family following the sudden loss of a child. There can be a lot of societal pressure on fathers to be strong, making it difficult for them to express grief. The Mile in Memory Remembrance Walk allows family members to come together, and support each other in their grief, surrounded by relatives, friends, and the wider community. It is a very special event filled with love, laughter, and tears as well as opportunities to share memories and reflect. Some groups choose to include poetry recitals or picnics and refreshments as a part of the day.

If you would like to host a walk in your area and require support please email Andrew@firstlight.ie

The Annual General Meeting of the Irish Sudden Infant Death Association t/a FirstLight will be conducted by electronic means on 27 June, 2023 at 7.30pm.

Further details will be available on FirstLight's website, www.firstlight.ie.



Helping FirstLight to Support Suddenly Bereaved Families across Ireland



Demand for FirstLight's services has increased very substantially since 2019, with 373 families supported in 2022, compared to 207 in 2021 and 147 in 2020. Donations and fundraising events have been a very important source of income to FirstLight and have supported the provision of free professional counselling services to families around the country whose child has died suddenly.

With continuing support, FirstLight can provide timely professional crisis intervention and counselling services to families at this most challenging time.

Often, when we want to help, we just don't know where to start. This is why FirstLight has put together a fundraising guide, which we hope will inspire and assist anyone who wishes to support our services.

How to Fundraise on Behalf of FirstLight?

While no two fundraising events will be the same, we have some suggestions you may find helpful in putting together your event. However, remember, FirstLight is here to help every step of the way if you need it. We can supply fundraising materials such as flyers, collection buckets, posters, and t-shirts.

Decide on the purpose of the event and how you will raise funds

- Choose an event you will enjoy, and that will be popular with others. We have several suggestions below as to the type of events you can organise, or you may wish to come up with a new idea of your own.
- Is your event solely to raise funds, or will it also be to remember loved ones or to bring people together for support? Figuring out the details for your event will depend on knowing what goals you are trying to achieve.

Make a plan

- Planning is key to any successful fundraising activity.
- Plan your event well in advance of the date.
- Be aware of any legal requirements do you need insurance, a permit etc.?
- Estimate how many people will turn up, keep a tight budget, and choose a date that doesn't clash with any other popular events in your area.
- Make a timeline to complete each of the necessary tasks and ask some friends for help!
- You could even have your event sponsored by a local business.
- Prepare a way to register everyone who comes try to get their name, email, amount donated, etc. and always ensure it is GDPR compliant.
- Bring a cash box and store money in a safe space.
- Have signs prepared to hang up so people know they are in the right spot.
- Know the ins and outs of the location the parking, the toilets, emergency evacuation, etc.
- · Create a backup plan if the event is reliant on good weather.



· Tell the world what you're doing.

- Shouting about your fundraising is the best way to make sure it's a success, so tell everyone you know and then get them to tell everyone they know too!
- Send it through the grapevine. Use social media, leaflets, posters, emails, PR, and phone calls.
- Contact FirstLight so we can promote your event on our social media pages.
- Start raising money before the event through sites such as GoFundMe, Facebook fundraising pages, or iDonate. Promote these pages through social media.

• Engage.

- During the event, register and greet everyone who comes; thank them for coming.
- Create a positive atmosphere by getting people talking and looking out for those who appear to be lonely/lost/confused.
- Take photos and send them to FirstLight to be put on social media.
- Remember to enjoy the event yourself too!
- If you're in a public venue, be sure to clean up well after yourselves.

• Give everyone a round of applause.

- Afterwards, thank everyone who helped with the fundraising and donated or showed their support.
- Don't forget to give yourself a big pat on the back!

Where to send your much-needed donations?

By bank transfer to:

Bank: AIB

• Branch: Capel Street, Dublin 1

• Account Name: Irish Sudden Infant Death Association t/a FirstLight

Bank Account Number: 26806095

Sort Code: 93 11 01

• IBAN: IE62 AIBK 9311 0126 8060 95

BIC: AIBKIE2D

FirstLight Website Donation: If you have the funds in a bank account, you can directly donate through the FirstLight website.

Online Fundraising Platforms: If you don't want to handle cash donations, you can also use Facebook, GoFundMe or iDonate. Each platform will transfer funds directly to FirstLight via bank transfer.

COMMUNITY FUNDRAISING IDEAS



Attending or hosting an event in your community is a great way to get involved with and raise money for FirstLight.

Community Fundraising Ideas

Mile in Memory Walk.

The Mile in Memory Walk is a very special remembrance event where parents, families, friends and colleagues come together as a community in memory of a child or young person. Walk in memory, listen to parents' stories, light a remembrance candle, and experience the power of healing through community. FirstLight's 2023 Mile in Memory Remembrance Walk will take place on Father's Day, Sunday, June 18th. However, you may choose to host a mile in memory walk at any time.

Barn Dance

A Barn Dance is a country-themed event filled with music, dance, food, and fun. Put on your cowboy hat and flannel and enjoy this well-deserved entertaining night with your local community.

Bake it for Children (Bake Sale)

Bake tasty treats, share laughs, and remember loved ones. You can hold your bake sale at work, at school, at home, or in your local community. Whether your bakes are sweet or savoury, simple or show-stopping, the money you raise will greatly help bereaved parents and families.

FirstLight Quiz Night

Quiz nights are a fun-filled competitive evening filled with a plethora of weird and wonderful facts. Gather your brainiest friends together to enjoy this exciting night and try to take home first place.

Pyjama Day / Non-Uniform Day

Why not host a pyjama day or non-uniform day at your school, creche or workplace? Ask everyone to donate to participate, and you can all spend the day in a comfy outfit of your choosing. Host this event at any time or tie it in with National Pyjama Day on November 18th.

Car Wash / Dog Wash

Every dog owner wants a clean pooch, but groomers are expensive, and sometimes it's challenging to bathe a dog at home. This is where you come in! You need to find a location that has enough room and hot water for the task. If you're going to go outside, do it on a nice warm day so the dogs won't get cold. Remember to use specialist dog shampoo. The same goes for cars (though at least cars can't feel the cold!). Find a suitable public space where cars can safely park up to avail of your services. Again, use specialised cleaning products which won't damage anyone's vehicle.



Running

We all know that exercise can be just as important for our mental health as physical health, so why not try a fundraising event that will make you feel good while you do good. For the seasoned runner, there are a number of marathons held around the country each year, such as The Great Limerick Run, Sunday 30th April, The Cork City Marathon, Sunday 4th June and Irish Life Dublin Marathon Sunday, October 29th. There is also the ever-popular VHI Women's Mini Marathon Sunday 4th, June. However, there are also lots of smaller events nationwide, including 5k, 10k, and half marathons. Why not check out www.runningcalendar.ie for running events local to you.

Charity Dip or Cold-Water Challenge

Take the plunge and organise a charity dip or cold-water swimming event! It can be a great way to connect with nature and with others. If you are organising a charity swim event, you have a responsibility to ensure adequate water safety measures are in place, to reduce the possible risks to attendees. It is appropriate to inform local Gardaí about the event. An application to the local authority may be required for permission to access the location. Water Safety Ireland provides guidelines for several charity swim types, including charity dips, swims up to 3km and swims over 4km.

Alternatively, you could undertake a sponsored cold-water challenge, such as immersing yourself in cold water (cold shower, ice bath etc.) every day for a month. It won't be easy, but it will leave you feeling good in mind and body – and the money you raise will do good too.

10,000 Step Challenge

Similar to the cold-water challenge, how about taking on a personal challenge and receiving sponsorship for your efforts. Committing to 10,000 steps a day for a month can be a great way to keep healthy and raise funds. Keep your supporters up to date on your progress and remind them to donate by posting updates to your social media.

Golf (Or Other Sport) Tournament

Play a full 18-hole PGA-style tournament, or simply make it a putting or a miniature golf tournament for a kid-friendly affair. Charge green fees as donations. Book in with a public course or ask the captain or president of your local golf course to host your event. If golf isn't your sport, a similar format could be applied to a football, rugby, tennis, dodgeball, baseball or cricket tournament. Pitfalls of an event like this can be the weather, so keep an eye on the forecast and have alternative dates lined up – ensure you have contact information for participants in case you have to reschedule.

Online Fundraising Ideas

These days, it can be hard to get everyone together in the same place, and online events can be just as fun and engaging as inperson ones.

Some ideas for online events include; Quiz Night, Race Night, Raffles / Auction, Virtual Runathon/Bikeathon/Danceathon.

CORPORATE / WORKPLACE FUNDRAISING IDEAS:



Corporate Partnerships

FirstLight always welcomes the opportunity to develop new corporate relationships. Choosing to support FirstLight will provide a fantastic opportunity to engage your customers and employees whilst enabling us to continue our vital work in providing support to suddenly bereaved parents and families.

We work with companies who believe in our values and want to make a difference in their community. By partnering with FirstLight, you will be aligning with an incredibly well-loved and inspiring charity and our cause will motivate and unite your staff.

If your employer supports a charity and employees have the opportunity to nominate the charity that will receive support, please nominate FirstLight and ask your co-workers to support the nomination.

Interested? Please reach out to our General Manager at andrew@firstlight.ie.

Company Donations

FirstLight welcomes donations from company trusts, foundations and charity committees. You can choose to fund a specific project (e.g. the development of further counselling centres nationally) or sponsor an event (e.g. Mile in Memory Walk). From small donations to large, we appreciate it all.

Gifts in Kind

We are always looking for products, services, and professional advice to enable us to continue to grow as a charity and allocate our resources efficiently. We can provide many opportunities for your generous support to be acknowledged and showcased to your customers and clients.

Staff Fundraising Events

Choose from the many ideas listed above and host an event in aid of FirstLight at your workplace. It is a great way to boost morale and improve internal communications. It's also a fantastic opportunity to get your customers, clients and suppliers involved.

Awareness Events

You may wish to tie your event in with other, larger events such as Baby Loss Awareness Week (October 9th – 15th) and Bereaved Children's Awareness week (13th – 17th November). For more information on these events, visit www.babyloss-awareness.org and www.childhoodbereavement.ie.

If you would like to discuss any of the above, please call our Head Office on 01-8732711 or email andrew@firstlight.ie



The Great Limerick Run, Sunday 30th April 2023

• The Great Limerick Run is back on Sunday, 30th April 2023, with a distance for everybody. It is the biggest mass participation sporting event outside Dublin. Choose from a marathon, a marathon relay, a half marathon or a 6-mile event. For further details: www.greatlimerickrun.com

Cork City Marathon, Sunday 4th June 2023

• The Cork City Marathon is back on Sunday, 4th June 2023 with a Marathon, Half Marathon, and 10k event. The course takes you through the beautiful and unique streetscapes of Cork City and its suburbs. For further details: www.corkcitymarathon.ie

VHI Women's Mini Marathon, Sunday 4th June 2023

• The VHI Women's Mini Marathon, an annual 10k charity road race, occurs each June bank holiday weekend in Dublin and is the largest women's event of its kind in the world. For further details: www.vhiwomensminimarathon.ie

Mile in Memory Walk 2022, Father's Day Sunday 18th June 2023

• FirstLight's annual Mile in Memory Remembrance Walk will take place on Father's Day Sunday, June 18th, nationwide. If you would like to host a walk in your area please email andrew@firstlight.ie or phone 01-8732711

Baby Loss Awareness Week, 9th to 15th October 2023

• An annual collaboration between more than 60 charities across the UK and Ireland, Baby Loss Awareness Week aims to raise awareness about the key issues affecting those who have experienced a sudden loss of a child. For further details: www.babyloss-awareness.org

Global Wave of Light, Sunday, October 15th 2023, 7:00 pm

Please join FirstLight for the Global Wave of Light Sunday, October 15th at 7 pm. Baby Loss Awareness Week finishes each
year on October 15th with the Global Wave of Light'. October 15th is also International Pregnancy and Infant Loss
Remembrance Day and is recognised across the world we would like to invite you to join with other families across the world
and take part in the Global Wave of Light'. For further details: www.babyloss-awareness.org

Irish Life Dublin Marathon, Sunday, October 29th 2023

• The Irish Life Dublin Marathon is the fourth-largest marathon in Europe. More than 20,000 runners from over 60 countries will take to Dublin city centre course on October 29th 2023. The race takes in many of Dublin's historic landmarks and finishes in the heart of the city. For further details visit: www.irishlifedublinmarathon.ie

Bereaved Children's Awareness Week, 13th - 17th November 2023

• Bereaved Children's Awareness Week takes place each year in November to highlight bereaved children's needs and to provide a voice for them to be heard. For further details: www.childhoodbereavement.ie

Submit Referrals @ www.firstlight.ie

Carmichael Centre, 4 North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7 Phone: 01-8732711: Website: www.firstlight.ie: Charity No. CHY7716