

SHATTERED

*Surviving
the Loss
of a Child*

A photograph of a calm body of water at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and light blue, with soft clouds. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright reflection on the water. A dark line of trees and land is visible in the distance. In the foreground, some reeds or tall grasses are visible on the left side, partially submerged in the water.

Gary Roe

PRAISE FOR SHATTERED

"In *Shattered*, Gary Roe utilizes the stories and journeys of many bereaved parents to walk the reader from shock to hope. Gary is no stranger to the reality of grief and utilizes his unique empathy and understanding gained though a lifetime of working with the bereaved to create a truly healing book."

—Glen Lord, President/CEO, The Grief Toolbox;
President, National Board of Directors, The
Compassionate Friends, father of Noah
Thomas Emory Lord, who died at age 4½

"Few people truly comprehend the unique and challenging grief experiences of bereaved parents. Yet Gary Roe not only understands but also offers hope, healing, and compassion from a Christian perspective. As a bereaved parent and also as a professional who has worked with bereaved parents, I would highly recommend *Shattered*."

—Peggy Telg, Independent Bereavement
Educator, mother of Michael and
Christopher, who died in infancy

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"Shattered is a sensitive, compassionate, and thorough treatment of an extremely emotional and difficult subject. Bereaved parents and grandparents everywhere will benefit from this heartfelt book and find some healing and hope in its pages. I would highly recommend this book for groups as well."

—Paul Casale, Licensed Marriage & Family
Therapist and Mental Health Counselor

"There isn't a book that can be written to explain exactly how we feel, but *Shattered* is no doubt the closest I've seen. This book doesn't only apply to those who've lost a child, but can also help those who are dealing with a friend or family member who has lost a child. Thanks to Gary Roe for helping us speak and giving our shattered lives a voice."

—Michelle Jeter, author of *A Legacy of a Lifetime*
and mother of Sydney, who died at age 16

"In *Shattered*, Gary Roe uniquely and delicately addresses the devastating subject of losing a child. This book will be an excellent resource, not only for bereaved parents, but also for those who support them."

—Joangeli Kasper, Licensed Professional Counselor

"Your grief will be unique because your child was unique. Nevertheless, you will find something helpful in *Shattered*. Gary offers tons of practical advice about moving through this challenging time."

—Cherry Moore, hospice chaplain, artist,
and mother of Lew, who died at age 16

"There's nothing more devastating and painful in life than the loss of a child. The challenge of living life after such an event is staggering. *Shattered* is a source of compassionate insight into a truly difficult topic, the handiwork of Gary Roe's efforts to bring hope and healing."

—Dr. Craig Borchardt, President/
CEO, Hospice Brazos Valley

"*Shattered* is superb. I believe that anyone could read it and find help with their grief after losing a child. It is a thorough, timely, and much needed book that could also be used as an excellent grief counseling reference manual."

—Dr. Tony Taylor, Senior Pastor,
Hilltop Lakes Chapel

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“As a mental health professional for three decades, I find great value in Gary’s presentation of one of the toughest clinical issues to deal with in therapy. Most adults verbalize the loss of a child as one of their top fears. I will keep several copies on hand for families or support folks walking this difficult journey.”

—Carrie Andree, Licensed Professional Counselor

“When my 4-day old Allie died with Trisomy 18, I was numb, sad, and then angry. This book helped me work through each stage of my feelings. I thought I was going crazy and that I would never be the same again. As I was reading *Shattered*, I started feeling that my mental state was justifiable. It is truly a book of healing!”

—Ronna Prickett, mother of
Allie, who died in infancy

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BOOKSELLERS

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OTHER BOOKS BY GARY ROE

*Please Be Patient, I'm Grieving: How to Care
For and Support the Grieving Heart*
(2016 USA Best Book Awards Finalist)

HEARTBROKEN: Healing from the Loss of a Spouse
(2015 USA Best Book Awards Finalist, National
Indie Excellence Book Awards Finalist)

*Surviving the Holidays Without You: Navi-
gating Grief During Special Seasons*
(2016 Book Excellence Awards Finalist)

(co-authored with Cecil Murphey)

Saying Goodbye: Facing the Loss of a Loved One

*Not Quite Healed: 40 Truths for Male Sur-
vivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse*
(2013 Lime Award Finalist for Excellence in Non-Fiction)



OPENING REMARKS:

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ALL ABOUT

THE LOSS OF A CHILD is a terrible thing.

Unthinkable, unbelievable, and heartbreaking. Devastating, shocking, and crushing. Paralyzing, shattering, and traumatic. These are a few of the words grieving parents have shared with me. Whatever words we choose, they all fall far short of the reality.

How do we survive this? Can we?

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

For several years, people have been asking me to write this resource. Honestly, I didn't want to. The mere thought of it terrified me. The death of a child is such a tender, emotionally power-packed subject. Deep in my heart, I was afraid that I would fail and somehow make things even worse.

So I kept putting the idea on the back burner saying, "Maybe one day."

About a year ago, a hospice colleague I deeply respect pulled me aside and challenged me. "You have to write this book," she said. She had lost two children herself. I began to seriously pray about it.

Over the next several months, I kept encountering grieving parents — many more than usual. I received dozens of requests in person and online. "Help! Please write some-

thing for us.” I referred parents to organizations, other authors, and many excellent resources. Yet, the pleas kept coming.

Finally, I gave in.

What you have in your hand or on your screen is the result of three decades’ experience as a missionary, pastor, and hospice chaplain, interacting with hundreds of parents who have lost children. I’ve also conducted over 150 interviews of grieving parents over the last year. Hearing these stories and compiling this book has been one of the most intense emotional projects in which I have ever been involved.

WHAT READERS CAN EXPECT

What will readers get from this book?

First, this book is not a magic pill. This cannot be fixed. There are no easy answers. To some things, there may be no answers at all.

Secondly, the loss of a child affects everything. I mean everything. It impacts all of us, our whole person—emotionally, mentally, physically, spiritually, and relationally. It alters the present and the future.

As a result, I’ve divided this book into six parts:

- The Emotional Impact
- The Mental Impact
- The Physical Impact
- The Spiritual Impact
- The Relational Impact
- The Future Impact

Chapters are purposefully brief, easy-to-read, and practical. In each story, the names have been changed to protect

the privacy of those involved. Each chapter concludes with a statement that expresses what many are feeling during this grief process, along with some questions to consider or an exercise to try. Intellectually understanding grief is one thing. Processing and moving through it is another. This book was written to facilitate both.

The overall goal is to help parents grieve in healthy and responsible ways. This includes:

- Managing the massive changes that are occurring in your life
- Taking care of yourself during this process
- Honoring your child with your grief
- Loving those around you, even with a broken heart
- Living life as well as possible in the midst of great pain
- Making your child's life count in deep and powerful ways

SOME PERSONAL NOTES...

Please know this: I haven't figured this grief thing out. I don't see myself as further along than anyone else in any category. At best, I'm a fellow struggler. I tussle regularly with emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual issues stemming from the losses I have endured and encounter daily.

As I write this, I see myself walking alongside you in the valley of grief. I can't pretend to know how you feel or the depth of your pain. I want to meet you where you are and learn with you, and from you. I consider this a great honor and privilege.

This is one of the positive miracles of the grief process.

Though we're all different and our losses are all unique, we can still walk together. Thank goodness. We need each other. Desperately.

My prayer is that this book will be comforting, encouraging, and hope-giving. I hope your heart finds it so.

Before you read on, allow me to assure you of three things. Read them slowly. Let them sink in.

1. You are not alone, though an overwhelming loneliness might seize you at any given moment.
2. You are not crazy, but losing a child will make you think you are.
3. You can survive this, though many times you might wonder how.

Breathe deeply. This is a tough, hard journey. I'm honored to be traveling with you.

Gary Roe

January 2017



PART ONE:

THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT

AT FIRST, WE'RE SHOCKED. WE'RE stunned, perhaps even emotionally paralyzed. We blink, and wonder what happened.

Waves of emotion come crashing in. We're sad. We're angry. We feel guilty, anxious, fearful, and depressed. We're frustrated and confused. Panic descends at times. We feel lost and alone.

Nothing is as it was. Everything seems surreal.

In this section, we'll be talking about the incredible emotional impact of our loss. How do we handle the powerful onslaught of feelings? Is it possible to manage them in a healthy way? If so, how?

Breathe deeply, and read on...



CHAPTER 1

SHOCK: “THIS CAN’T BE REAL!”

“The only education in grief that any of us ever gets is a crash course.”

– Gail Calwell

“THIS ISN’T HAPPENING! THIS CAN’T be real!” Carla said, as she sat in the family area outside the Emergency Room.

“One moment she’s here. The next, she’s gone. How can this be?” she asked frantically.

Carla blinked. Her eyes took on a glazed appearance. She looked past me, staring at the blank wall by the door.

Carla was in shock.

Carla’s daughter Carrie was six weeks old when she died. She had just started to coo. SIDS robbed Carla and her husband David of their precious little girl.

No wonder Carla was in shock. How could she not be?

AN EMOTIONAL TASER

When loss hits the heart, we’re stunned. Like an emotional taser, sudden shock waves immobilize us.

Shock can be a good thing. It acts to shield us from the full onslaught of reality. Otherwise the blow might kill us.

When we first hear the news, time stops. It's like someone pushed the pause button on the universe. Our hearts reel. Our minds spin.

No. This cannot be happening. This cannot be real.

Shock is normal. The loss of a child is like being hit by an unexpected tsunami. It knocks us senseless. Shock can be momentary, or last for days or weeks.

Shock is not something we graduate from in grief. It is something that we move in and out of, numerous times, as needed. Our hearts need time to grasp the enormity of what happened. Even years later, we might have trouble coming to grips with it.

We don't want this to be happening. We don't want this to be real. We want our child back. Now.

*"No wonder I'm in shock. How could I
not be? I love you so much."*

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

When and how have you experienced shock in your grief process?

Do you still experience moments of shock from time to time? What are these times like for you?

FROM A FELLOW GRIEVING PARENT:

*"I still go in and out of shock. You will too. Our
hearts can't accept that they're gone."*

CHAPTER 2

STUNNED: “I CAN HARDLY TALK”

“There is a feeling of disbelief that comes over you, that takes over, and you kind of go through the motions.”

– Frederick Barthelme

“I CAN’T THINK. I CAN hardly talk,” Steve stammered, as he sat in the booth across from me.

When I entered the restaurant and sat down, Steve didn’t see me. He was looking at the menu. I sat there for several minutes, unnoticed, while Steve stared at the same fixed point on the page.

When I softly cleared my throat, Steve slowly raised his head and blinked.

“Hi Gary. I didn’t see you come in,” he said slowly.

Everything seemed to be in slow motion for Steve.

His daughter Stephanie had been killed in a car crash a few days prior. Everything since then had been a blur, including the funeral. She was 16.

Steve and his wife Bonnie were stunned. Their lives had been forever changed in an instant.

THE UNTHINKABLE STUNS US

When death strikes, it can be merciless. The loss of a child

is unthinkable. When the unthinkable becomes reality, we're stunned.

It's like being smacked on the head with a brick dropped from a 5-story building. We didn't see it coming. At first, we don't know what hit us.

We stagger, stumble, and fall. The best we can hope for is to lay there and still be able to breathe somehow.

The magnitude of the hit is so great, our minds can't begin to process it. Our hearts refuse to do so. The world just cracked in two.

We find ourselves momentarily frozen, immobile. We're awake, but not all there. We can't be. The truth would kill us instantly.

We stare. We blink. We can't think. We mumble.

Call it disbelief. Call it denial. We're stunned. We should be.

"I'm stunned. How can this be? I don't want to believe it."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Does anything from Steve's experience resonate with you? If so, what?

Most of us are good at putting on an act. Do you give yourself permission to be "stunned?"

FROM A FELLOW GRIEVING PARENT:

"I literally couldn't talk, but I could cry. I did a lot of that. Still do. Sometimes tears are better than words anyway."

CHAPTER 3

SURREAL: “THIS IS WEIRD”

“In the midst of a world that moves, I alone am still.”

— Natsume Soseki

“THIS IS WEIRD. EVERYTHING IS different, but it all looks the same. It’s like living in some kind of alternate universe,” Craig shared. “But then I walk into Matthew’s room and the nightmare becomes real all over again.”

Craig’s son Matthew contracted spinal meningitis and died within a matter of days over the Christmas holidays. He was 13.

Like many child losses, Mathew’s illness and death came out of nowhere. The shock was immense.

The shock waves soon hit Matthew’s friends and classmates. Practically the entire school was at the funeral. Most were stunned and silent. There was simply nothing to say that could make much of a difference.

“Surreal. I guess that’s what you would call it. Nothing seems real,” Craig concluded.

For weeks, Matthew’s family lived in the stunned silence of the surreal. Matthew’s absence was palpable. Everything felt weird, and wrong.

LIVING IN AN ALTERNATE UNIVERSE

When our lives are struck by loss, our world changes immediately. Of course, we don't experience all the changes at once. We experience them over the days, months, and even years that follow. This creates a "disconnect" between us and the world at large.

Our world is different. We have a new, huge hole in our hearts. So we find ourselves in this in-between place. We know our child is gone, but a part of us hasn't accepted that yet. We don't want to accept it, or perhaps we just can't.

Our world has cracked wide open, but we don't know what this fully means. We do know the whole world seems empty because our child is no longer in it.

"Everything is weird now. You're not here anymore, and I don't want that to be real."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

How have things seemed surreal to you since the loss of your child?

Do you find yourself looking at the world differently than you did before? In what way?

FROM A FELLOW GRIEVING PARENT:

"Grief will come in waves. When it comes, go with it. You will get through grief by grieving."
