

To My Family, Friends, and Those Who Showed Compassion

Read online with photographs and supporting records

To my family, friends, and those who showed compassion,

There are things I wish I could sit down and say to each of you. Since losing Bella, I have struggled to find words large enough for what I carry. Sometimes a memory makes me smile, and a moment later I am crying because I cannot share another day with her.

I created this website because I want you to know the little girl I knew and loved. I want you to hear her laughter, see her imagination, and understand why the ordinary moments we shared mean so much to me.

She called me Babe. Behind that one word was a whole relationship: bedtime stories, shared chocolate, drawings, music, basketball, and little arguments that somehow became our favorite routines. She made me laugh. She challenged me. She taught me things I am still trying to understand.

Some of you knew Bella well. Some knew her through family gatherings, school, sports, or the stories I told about her. Others may be learning about her here for the first time. Wherever you begin, I hope you will take the time to meet her as a child with her own personality, wishes, and plans.

She wanted to try so many things. She loved her puppy, Stuffuls. She could turn her room into a classroom and insist that her Teacher Tuesday class was the best. She drew things her own way. She wanted to go to Paris. She still had so much growing and living ahead of her.

I want those parts of Bella to remain close to us. I want someone to remember a funny thing she said and say it out loud. I want her name to come up at family gatherings. I want the people who loved her to feel that they can speak about her with me, even when the memory brings tears.

To the family and friends who have stood beside me throughout this difficult time, thank you. Some of you knew Bella well. Some knew her only a little. Yet each of you made room for my grief and continued to support me. You never made me feel that I had to prove my love for my daughter to deserve your compassion.

Even when the accusations against me were at their loudest, you continued to stand beside me. You knew me and had seen my love for Bella. Your trust and support meant more than I can fully explain.

At the weakest moments of my life, you showed up in ways I never expected. When I struggled to find enough strength to get through another day, you reminded me that I did not have to face it alone. I will always remember the people who stayed close when I was hurting most.

Some of you prayed with me. Some prayed for me. And some have continued those prayers long after the first painful days, remembering that my grief did not end when everyone returned to their routines. Thank you for continuing to ask God to give me strength, for remembering Bella, and for keeping me in your prayers.

You could not take away the pain of losing my little girl, but your support helped me carry it. I may never find words big enough to thank you. Please know that I remember what you have done for me, and I will carry that gratitude for the rest of my life.

Some of you helped without saying very much at all. You showed up, sat with me, called to check on me, helped with ordinary things, or simply stayed close. I learned that compassion does not always arrive through perfect words. Sometimes it is simply someone refusing to let you be alone.

A Special Thank You to My Cousins

I want to give a special thank you to all of my cousins who played such an important role in Bella's life and in helping me raise and care for her.

Some of you lived with me. Some of you helped me take care of Bella when I needed help. You were there for the routines, the busy days, the fun days, and the ordinary moments that I did not realize at the time would someday become some of my most precious memories.

The truth is, I could not have done it without you.

You did more than help me care for Bella. You welcomed her into your homes and included her in outings, celebrations, and ordinary days with your own children. You gave her experiences I could not always give her by myself, and you gave me the peace of knowing she was with people who loved her.

You gave Bella more people to love, and you gave me people I could trust with the person I loved most.

For every time you picked her up, took her somewhere, fed her, watched her, played with her, listened to her, included her with your children, or simply gave her another ordinary day filled with family and love, thank you.

I especially want to remember Fannie and Vicky, Bella's favorite cousins.

You were part of her childhood in a way that was uniquely yours. You played together, laughed together, and created the kinds of memories children make without realizing how precious those

memories will someday become. Teacher Tuesday and so many other little moments were part of that world you shared with Bella.

Fannie and Vicky, I know how much you loved her. I know you missed her when she was not around, and I know you miss her now.

Vicky, I will always remember that after Bella died, you continued to pray for her because you did not fully understand what death meant. There was something so innocent and loving about that. In your heart, Bella was still your cousin, someone you loved, missed, and wanted to pray for.

That has stayed with me.

I hope both of you carry your memories of Bella as you grow older. Remember her laughter. Remember playing together. Remember Teacher Tuesday. Remember the silly moments and the ordinary days. And always remember how much your cousin loved being with you.

I hope as you grow older, you understand how important you were to Bella too.

I also know that I am not the only person who lost Bella. You lost her too. Your children lost their cousin and their friend. Fannie and Vicky lost someone who had been part of their childhood. Each of you carries your own memories of her, including moments I may never even know about.

I know some of you carry your grief differently and may not always speak about it, but I want you to know that I recognize your loss too.

If your children remember something she said or did, please help them hold on to it.

Because those memories are pieces of Bella's life too.

You helped me raise her. You helped me care for her. You helped give her experiences and memories. Most importantly, you helped make sure my little girl knew she was loved.

For that, I will always be grateful.

To Those Who Reached Out

To the people who did not know me personally, but who learned about Bella through social media, mutual friends, or simply by hearing what had happened, thank you.

Some of you reached out with condolences, prayers, and words of kindness without ever having met me. You did not know exactly what to say, and you did not need to. You simply recognized that a father had lost his little girl and chose to respond with compassion.

Some messages came from complete strangers. Others came from people I had known at different times in my life but had not spoken to in years. There were friendships that life, distance, and time

had allowed to fade, and somehow, in the middle of the worst loss of my life, some of those friendships found their way back.

I wish it had happened for a different reason. I wish Bella's death had never been what brought any of us back into one another's lives. But I am grateful for every person who reached across those years of silence and simply said, "I'm here."

Some of you checked on me once. Others kept checking. Some called, sent messages, prayed for me, listened to me talk about Bella, or simply reminded me that people still cared when my world felt very small.

You did not have to know Bella personally to recognize that her life mattered. You did not have to know every detail of what happened to recognize that I had lost my daughter.

There is something I will always remember about that kind of compassion: you reached out before asking me to explain myself. You offered kindness because another human being was hurting.

To the strangers who became sources of comfort, to the old friends who found their way back, and to everyone who heard about Bella and chose compassion, thank you.

Your messages, calls, prayers, and simple acts of kindness mattered more than you probably realized.

I remember them. And I remember you.

To Those Who Hold a Special Place in My Life

And to those who hold a special place in my life, I want to thank you too.

You have seen parts of this grief that most people never see. You have been there during the quiet moments, when there was no audience and nothing to say that could make things better. You have listened when I needed to talk about Bella, allowed me to be silent when I had no words, and understood that grief does not follow a schedule.

You have seen the days when I could laugh and the days when a memory of Bella suddenly changed everything. You never asked me to stop talking about her or made me feel that my grief was something I needed to leave behind.

You made room for Bella in my life by making room for my love for her.

That means more to me than I can explain.

I know loving and caring about someone who is grieving can sometimes be difficult. There are parts of me that changed when Bella died, and there are wounds that time may soften but will never completely erase.

Thank you for understanding that remembering Bella is not something separate from knowing me. She will always be part of who I am.

Thank you for your patience, your presence, your understanding, and for standing beside me through moments that were not always easy.

You know who you are.

I am grateful that you are here.

To My Therapist

To my therapist, thank you for supporting me when I did not know how to keep going.

You met me during a period of my life when grief, questions, anger, sadness, and everything happening around Bella's death sometimes felt impossible to carry at once. You gave me a place where I could talk about Bella without having to explain why I needed to talk about her again.

You listened to the memories that made me smile and the ones that broke me. You helped me navigate days when I did not know what I was supposed to do with everything I was feeling. You reminded me that grief does not move in a straight line and that there was no timetable for learning how to live with the absence of my daughter.

Most importantly, you gave me a place where I could simply be Bella's father—where I could talk about how much I loved her, how much I missed her, and how difficult it was to imagine continuing through life without her.

You understood that the hardest part did not end after the funeral, after the calls became less frequent, or after the rest of the world continued moving. You continued to meet me where I was.

I know that helping someone carry grief is not the same as being able to take that grief away. You never pretended that you could fix what could not be fixed. You helped me learn how to carry what I could not change.

For your patience, your compassion, your listening, and for continuing to help me navigate a life that became very different after Bella died, thank you.

I will always remember what your support meant to me during one of the most difficult periods of my life.

To Those Who May Have Formed an Opinion About Me

I also want to say something to those who may have formed an opinion about me during the most painful and confusing period of my life.

I understand that reconsidering something this painful may not be easy. Grief, emotion, repetition, and hearing only one side can shape what any of us believe. Reaching a conclusion based on what you knew at the time does not make you a bad person. But when more information becomes available, I ask that you be willing to look again.

And that is also why I will never forget those of you who refused to judge me before you knew the facts. You did not need every answer in order to show me compassion. You understood that an accusation, no matter how serious or how often repeated, was still an accusation.

At one of the weakest and most painful moments of my life, you allowed me to grieve my daughter without making me defend myself to you.

For those who reached a different conclusion about me, I am not asking for an apology, and I am not asking you to take my word for anything. I am simply asking you to look at what is documented, including information that may not have been available to you when you first formed your opinion, and then decide for yourself.

Bella deserves that kind of honesty. And so do the people who loved her.

To those I expected to hear from but did not, your silence hurt too. I did not need perfect words, explanations, or answers. A simple “How are you holding up?” would have meant something.

I needed people to remember that behind everything being said was a father trying to live through the loss of his daughter.

I also know that some of you may have questions about what happened and what you have heard. This website is a place for me to share my memories and my account, alongside supporting records where available.

I ask you to read carefully, consider the sources for yourself, and distinguish what a document establishes from what I remember or believe. Please leave room for questions when the answers are not established.

You do not have to understand every part of my grief to recognize that Bella was my daughter and that I loved her. Our time together mattered. The love she gave me mattered.

I will carry both for the rest of my life.

Please Keep Remembering Bella

Please do not be afraid to say Bella’s name around me. Tell me something funny she said. Share a photograph or video I have never seen. Help me hold on to the moments you shared with her that I never had the chance to witness. It may bring tears, but it also gives me another little piece of her life.

I still want to hear about my daughter.

When I look at all the people I am thanking in this letter—family, cousins, old friends, new friends, people who reached out from a distance, and those who stayed especially close—I realize that in one way or another, Bella is at the center of all of it.

Some of you knew and loved her. Some of you know her now through the stories I tell. Some of you never had the chance to meet her but cared about her because you cared about me.

That reminds me that a life does not have to be long to reach many people.

Bella was here for ten years. Those ten years mattered.

She left memories in people who knew her, stories in people who loved her, and a love in me that did not end when her life did.

That is why remembering her matters so much to me.

My hope is that you will leave this website knowing more of Bella: her humor, her curiosity, her determination, and the joy she brought into an ordinary day.

Thank you for taking the time to remember my little girl with me.

Her life must be remembered.

With love,

Dukens Pierre-Louis

Bella's father — her Babe