

## Finding New Life after the Death of My Son: Grace and Forgiveness in the Age of Counterfeit Pills and Fentanyl Poisoning

**Mark Bodnarczuk**

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*Finding New Life after the Death of My Son is a thoughtful, raw memoir about leaning into life after grief.*

Mark Bodnarczuk's wrenching memoir *Finding New Life after the Death of My Son* covers his grief and deep existential crisis after losing his child to fentanyl poisoning.

In 2021, eighteen-year-old Thomas died in his room after taking Xanax laced with a lethal dose of fentanyl. His father discovered his body. Split into three parts focused on surviving, recovering, and new beginnings, this book covers Bodnarczuk's subsequent three-year period of grief.

The first section includes the first family holiday after Thomas died and the first Christmas without him; it ends with the words "I made it." In time, Bodnarczuk decided to sell their family home and move out of state. And parts two and three of the book work toward space for reconsidering the past from a place of honesty, even seeking evidence of blessings in the wake of Thomas's death. Eventually, the text shifts from narrating the past to reflecting on the act of remembering itself: "As I sit here writing this, I still shake my head and say to myself, I can't believe this happened to me."

In addition to the gritty process of grief, the book also has religious, legal, and psychological elements. The family's Christian traditions are covered, as are the religious discoveries that Thomas's death catalyzed for his parents. In a personal digression, Carl Jung's theories and practices are plumbed for meaning too. Elsewhere, the text covers a lengthy court process to hold the person who sold Thomas the poisoned pill accountable.

Its prose vulnerable, the text takes on taboo subjects throughout, as when Bodnarczuk raises questions regarding who was responsible for Thomas's death, even indicating himself in his role as a father. Thomas's role in his own death and God's role are explored. Answers are not always proffered from the book's explorations, though, as with the dreams that Bodnarczuk had before and after Thomas's death, the dreams that Thomas shared with his father, and questions about what those dreams truly meant. More lucid is the book's characterization of Thomas himself, which honors the bonds that he formed with others in addition to the enduring impact of his loss.

A dauntless memoir about leaning into life after grief, *Finding New Life after the Death of My Son* is moving in its examinations of life, death, and faith.

WILLEM MARX (August 8, 2024)

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