

# Serenity Prayer - en

By: Blythe Fowler



**This is a true story about a mother and two sons; it is heart wrenching.** It's about finding acceptance rather than closure, and the sustaining provision of God's design for the lives of His children.

Born in the country, the youngest of four children, Joan grew up on a family farm in southeastern Oklahoma. Her father was kind and understanding; he taught her about farm work - especially the livestock. She learned all she could about vet work and nurturing animals.

Her mother was quick-tempered and bitter. Joan

often suffered swift, precise punishment from her rejecting hand.

Joan wanted a family of her own and settled into married life with a man she met in college. They started their own business and welcomed their first son, Johnny in 1965; second son Jack, followed in 1974.

Income from the family business fell as Oklahoma's oil industry spiraled down and Joan took a job outside the home. Away during the day, she was unaware her husband started another business dealing in drugs and recruiting their sons to get involved.

Divorce was immediate - yet not effective in curtailing her sons' drug use. Johnny was addicted and Jack was following in his brother's footsteps.

Returning to her roots, Joan poured herself into a new ranching opportunity and gave all she

had to nurturing her sons. Johnny was placed in three drug rehabilitation programs, but the love, prayers and worry of his mother could not stop the destructive compulsions of a young man gripped by addiction and denial. Johnny died of a drug overdose at the age of 33.

Struggling to hold onto the shattered fragments of a family, Joan and Jack grew closer working the ranch together. Gradually his party spirit and drug use began to take control and Jack was sent to prison for two years, for driving a stolen vehicle under the influence.

While in prison, Jack joined a 12 Step Christ-centered program offered by the Celebrate Recovery (CR) Inside

Ministry. His sobriety restored, Jack was released from prison just before Thanksgiving 2004. He and Joan moved into a new home with a large kitchen and family room so Jack could entertain friends from CR and continue recovery. Mother and son joined the Celebrate Recovery Ministry at Southern Hills Baptist Church and began the process of piecing together their broken lives, rebuilding relationships and reaching out to help others in recovery.

A bright aura of love and joy surrounded the mother and son duo. Life was good.

In January 2005, Jack sought much-needed dental work. Keeping his history of drug use a secret from the dentist, Jack received prescription pain medication and quickly found an unethical physician who would give him more for a large fee.

Jack had been clean and drug free for two years; he had no idea that his body would react immediately to an injection of the pain medication. He died before the syringe had been emptied - his heart exploded and took him down.

Joan found Jack draped over the bathtub, about six hours after the lethal dose. They had 62 wonderful days together; it was over now.

Is any parent ever prepared to bury a child? Our loving God must surely provide special blessings to those who suf-

fer such tremendous loss - how else can one go on? It is unfathomable to imagine the loss of all one's children.

Joan cycled through the stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining and depression were her daily regimen - yet acceptance would not come. Seeking professional counseling and support from friends in Celebrate Recovery, Joan slowly began to function again - leaning on the declaration of faith that David made in Psalm 27: The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

The turning point came for Joan when she fully embraced a statement in the Serenity Prayer: "...

accepting hardship as a pathway to peace; taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it." Letting go of her dreams of a son who would grow to be a world famous chef and another who would excel as an attorney, Joan accepted the fact her sons had fallen into the pit of drug addiction and would never achieve these goals.

Joan started a small grief support group at her church and then launched one through the Celebrate Recovery Ministry at Southern Hills. Today, the grief support group continues and Joan visits other CR Ministries, sharing her story of loss and restoration, encouraging the formation of other grief support groups.

As one who has been in the audience when Joan speaks, I have witnessed the conviction of hearts as adults and young people alike realize the impact of their actions upon the only other one known for unconditional love - their mother. ☘