



## Parents share stories of losing their children in commemoration of Worldwide Candle Lighting day

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**D**r. Syleecia Thompson, co-star of TV One's *R&B Divas: Atlanta* and manager and sister of R&B singer Syleena Johnson, wants people who have suffered the loss of a child this holiday season to know that they are not alone.

In fact, today is [Worldwide Candle Lighting](#) day — a day for all those impacted by the loss of a child to unite as they honor their sons' and daughters' memories.

The loss of a child is one of the worst experiences a person can endure. During the holidays, remembering such a tragic event can be especially devastating. To help families cope, the Compassionate Friends Network founded the annual [Worldwide Candle Lighting](#) day of remembrance in 1997 as a small Internet-based observance for families who have experienced the death of a child. Since then, the annual event has grown both online and offline to over 300 events in the U.S. and over 40 in foreign countries.

In recognition of Worldwide Candle Lighting, theGrio asked Thompson and two other parents to share their stories of coping with the loss of a child. Wendy McLean, an entrepreneur and philanthropist talks about the devastating loss of her 2-year-old son, Denim Wallace McLean, who died after getting hit by a car. And Peter Wright, Sr. recalls the gang-led violent [murder](#) of his 21-year-old son and community leader, Glenn "Spoof" Wright.

Together, these parents share their stories so that others can find strength and inspiration in their journeys of love, loss, pain and hope. On Worldwide Candle Lighting day, this holiday season, parents who have lost children must know: [you are supported and understood](#).

Here are these parents' stories, in their own words.

## Dr. Syleecia Thompson

Nikeeya Nichelle Fisher is the daughter I delivered, but whose face I never saw. She was stillborn due to intrauterine growth restriction (IUGR), a condition which prevented her from growing at a normal rate.

Prior to her diagnosis, I was ecstatic to be pregnant. I had delayed having a child while in pursuit of my education and career goals. Now finally at the age of 40, I was about to embrace motherhood. I knew I would love this challenge, and I was preparing for my entire world to change for the better.

But joy was short-lived because at 21 weeks my doctors placed me on a high risk pregnancy alert. Nikeeya was only measuring 17 weeks at that time, because she wasn't getting the proper oxygen and nutrients due to problems with my placenta. I was told that she wouldn't make it to 28 weeks. I didn't believe it. My faith kept me praying and focusing on trying to get her to grow through acupuncture and a high protein diet.

Sadly, the doctors were correct. On September 16, Nikeeya's heartbeat was gone. I was devastated. There was no time to mourn. Immediately I had to deliver the baby that had just died inside of me. After a difficult delivery I couldn't even see her, because her face and skin were distorted. I now only have pictures of her feet and her ashes.

That was the worst experience of my life. I am on medication and in physical therapy due to nerve damage in my left thigh (meralgia paresthetica) that I sustained during delivery. But the emotional damage is worse. I have three therapists and attend a support group for postpartum depression and grief. Every commercial with a baby makes me cry. Sometimes I get jealous of other pregnant women wishing it could be me. My boyfriend, Omar, and I want to get pregnant again, but I am afraid of another stillbirth. And I constantly ask myself, what did I do wrong? Doubting myself every step of the way, I continue to research and search for answers regarding the downsides of IUGR.

It's been almost three months since Nikeeya passed, and all I can do now is try to heal and help others by sharing my story. Next year I will launch an empowerment tour for women with my sisters Syleena Johnson and Syleete DeBois. My platform will be eliminating the stigma of stillbirths and miscarriages that disproportionately affect African-American women. And one day I want to establish the Sunshine Foundation in honor of my daughter, because even after death, Nikeeya will always be my sunshine.

## Wendy McLean

I don't remember the car accident that took away the life of my 2-year-old son, Denim Wallace McLean. All that I remember is his laughter and smile.

Denim brought sunshine to my busy life as a first-time mom, single parent and entrepreneur balancing three businesses. He was my best friend who always made me happy. I dreamed of him having his first date, going to college and becoming successful in life.

**B**ut I will never get to experience those moments with Denim. On April 4, he died from his injuries after an out-of-control car struck us both while we stood on a Brooklyn sidewalk. I've been able to piece that much together from what I've been told since following the crash. I have brain damage and memory loss. Plus I have two broken legs, a fractured pelvis and no sense of smell or taste.

At the age of 38, I spend my days in a nursing home learning to walk again and thinking about Denim with every step I try to take. My faith in God is gone. I don't know why God would take away something that meant everything to me. I wake up trying to figure out how to make it through the day and there's only one thing that motivates me, building Denim's legacy.

On Denim's first birthday I established the non-profit, [Denim Kids](#) so that when he grew up he could give back to others through his own charity. Initially we focused on providing underprivileged youth with clothing, [food](#) and school supplies. But now I've expanded the mission to include mental health and supportive services for caregivers dealing with the loss of a child. It's the only one of my businesses that I still run.

This past Sunday, we celebrated our new vision on what would have been Denim's third birthday with a memorial concert and ribbon cutting ceremony. Denim's spirit filled the place with love, laughter, smiles and healing. And I felt him by my side, keeping me going and letting me know that he is proud of Mommy.

## **Peter Wright, Sr.**

I feel like I have two lives: My 21 years with my son, Glenn "Spoof" Wright, and now four years without him. Glenn died on September 13, 2009, a day after Latin King gang members mistook him for someone else and stabbed him in the neck. Glenn was never involved in any criminal activity, or wrongdoing. He was simply cleaning his grandmother's windows when he was murdered.

My son, Glenn, meant the world to me. He was my best friend. We were Saturday buddies and would go grocery shopping together every weekend at Pathmark, or Trader Joe's. We would talk about nutrition, and he would cook healthy meals for me. He always wanted to make sure everyone ate healthy foods. That shows just how caring he was. He was also handy and could fix things. If you ever needed anything, he was there to help you.

But his love extended beyond his family. He shared all that he was with the community, too, through his work at [East Harlem Tutorial Program \(EHTP\)](#), and the non-profit organization, [The Point Community Development Corporation](#). He helped lead the EHTP robotics team to a national competition in Atlanta. Afterward, he coached and mentored future robotics team members.

At The Point he also worked with youth. In his spare time he was developing his artistic talents through photography, painting and drawing.

Glenn had so much to live for, and his [murder](#) has left me in shock and devastation. I know he is gone, but it still doesn't seem real. The only real thing is that in his short life he built a legacy. EHTP created an annual college scholarship in his name and his friends have formed [The House of Spoof Collective \(THOSC\)](#). Inspired by Glenn, THOSC has established a gallery and studio [space](#) in the Bronx and they regularly exhibit his work as part of their collection.

Once a month I attend a support group at [Harlem Mothers S.A.V.E.](#) While there I am reminded that there are so many other parents who lost children due to violence. So I share my story for them and most of all, for Glenn.