



LOVE. MOVE. RIZE. in 2025.

"RIZE: Crossroads"

By Karen A. Sparks

Grief, trauma, and pain are universal. We all need hope to survive, we need to have purpose.

We all run the race of life, and my race as a mother was over. Guilt and pain suffocated me, but one thought dominated my entire being— if I chose to die, my children would die a second death. Reagan and Grant were competitors, not quitters. I had to choose to live. I found my sanctuary by stepping back onto the running trail, literally and figuratively. Each step pounded my anger and grief deep into the earth and flooded me with pain and freedom. One of life's certainties is that we will face trials no matter the role we play at home, with friends, or in our careers.

We've all had people who held some negative power over us and told us what we "could or couldn't do." For example, David's years of gaslighting created a rollercoaster of emotions. His verbal and mental abuse tore me down with words and actions to the point where I was barely recognizable to myself, my family, and my friends. David said I was nothing without him. The dark part of me believed him.

Before I met David, he ran a marathon, and with each retelling of his race, it became a "tall tale," details changed, embellishing how he endured more obstacles than any other runners and he alone made it all the way to the finish.

I know marathons are incredible accomplishments; and am inspired by anyone who attempts or completes such a tough race. People should absolutely be proud and share their experience. But, David knew when to tell his story and which version to use to fuel his narcissism and get what he needed from his audience.

I'd always been into sports, basketball, cross country, track, and cheerleading all through elementary and high school. I wasn't the star player, but I gave it my all and loved being part of a team. I loved running and when I decided to get back into it, Reagan and Grant started running with me around the neighborhood. We had our own training sessions and they slowed down and kept pace with me.

R&G called out our small town landmarks which marked our course map, "C'mon mom, here comes First Baptist Church, you're almost to Diamond's Grocery Store! We can run in and get Gatorades, do you want red or blue this time? And we won't even get any candy!"

Rea did back handsprings in the grass and Grant performed football end zone dances to pump me up.

It was our special time together, the three of us.

On occasion, when David was in town and needed to be on "display" as "the family man," he'd run with us. Our whole demeanor changed as he took charge. David told R&G to "Hook Up," a term he used often instead of "behave" –referring to the Texas Longhorns, his favorite team. He wanted to show any onlookers how "well-behaved" his kids were while he quietly mocked me and told me I wasn't cut out to be a runner.

He'd smile and wave at the neighbors. Through his smile, in his cunning way David would tell me, "You don't have the endurance to run a marathon. You're too out of shape and slow. Let me show you what a fast pace looks like."

Then he would run ahead of us so he could loudly "fake cheer me/us on," from up the street for all to hear. My body would tense up, but I'd do my best to make sure my kids saw me smiling and trying. Inside I felt like a "Dead Woman Walking."

David *was* fast – at lying about having jobs, relying instead, on a constant cycle of "Same Day Loans," "Pawn Shops," and "Rent-to-Own" services. He was fast at manipulating and conning landlords, running toward people who were "marks", and blaming everyone else. He chose to be fast at nothing that truly mattered. We argued over his lies and empty promises. In the end,

after killing his own children, was his suicide letter addressed to me, neatly displayed in the passenger seat of his car, for all to see – blaming me for everything. Pawn tickets were organized like bank statements in his back seat.

Why hadn't I believed in myself the way my R&G did? They looked at me as though I could accomplish anything. Always cheering me on. There were so many people in my life who were there to encourage me and build me up during those times, but the voice of the monster was louder.

Several months after their deaths and when the initial "shock and adrenaline" faded and reality set in, my spiral into a dark depression eventually led to a suicide attempt. Then to a 90-day stay in residential therapy. Once I re-entered the world and started a job, I gained the mental clarity to *demand* the forensic files that the sheriff's office and others had kept from me "for my protection." As Rea and Grant's mother, I needed to see what my children had gone through. I needed to process everything -- the autopsy report, the crime scene photos, and the rest of the official reports. This was me using the tools I'd learned in therapy and the positive voices to start MOVING through the pain so I could help myself and eventually help others.

Just like coming to a crossroads on the trails, we choose to listen to the voices that berate us or the voices that encourage us. We can't allow anyone to tell us what we "cannot" do or "worry" about how people look at us.

I came to that crossroad in my race (life).

Okay, Karen, what voice are you going to listen to? The "Dead Woman Walking"? David?

I listened to the encouraging voice/s. I took the right turn and it led me to where I am today:

- Ultra Runner
- Pacer
- Race Director
- Leader of a Nonprofit
- Friend
- Embraced by Grieving Moms
- Ambassador of Hope
- Soon to-be Author
- Opportunities Ahead

It does not erase grief or pain, but God promises to restore and strengthen you as you rest in His promises and RIZE above to your purpose.

I'm still a mom, I live for my children. At any moment, it gets so dark; in my own thoughts, all I feel is sadness and loneliness.

People ask me all the time, "How do you keep going?"

I have to believe in and trust the process, and it's hell. I have to choose my faith. My purpose is to share with the world how I'm surviving the unsurvivable and to help as many as possible. I don't always feel like it, so I listen to the encouragers and I show up and toe the line. If I can do it, you can do it.

By choosing to show up, you find hope. And I hope my story helps you find your pace, find your hope, and find your purpose.

"Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit!...Keep your eyes on *Jesus*, who both began and finished this race we're in. *That* will shoot adrenaline into your souls!" -Hebrews 12:1-3 MSG

"Keep going. That pain you feel? That's fear melting away. Like wax off of a candle. That's weakness washing out of your pores like a monsoon. That's the old you being shed away like dead skin. That's the new you, **RISING** out of the ashes of your former self." –Author Unknown

It's been said that a light should not be hidden. We are God's poetry and workmanship, and with the gifts He gives us, He will prosper us and make us channels of blessing.

The Journey of Love grows deeper and deeper as we **RIZE**.

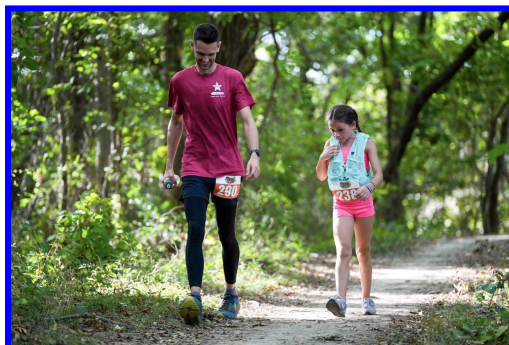
"Don't waste your sorrows. Psalm 126:5-6 says, "Your sorrows, your tears, are like seed. When sown properly can bring you a harvest of joy." There is purpose in your pain.

I want to remind you that God created you for a purpose...we are placed on this earth to show **LOVE** to others— but first we must realize we are **LOVED**—and we have to learn to **LOVE** ourselves. That's where we find joy.

MOVE through your pain, **MOVE** forward as you look for resources to help you.

RIZE above circumstances, the negative voices, find your purpose, feel the joy, the healing, and the freedom that comes with **RIZING**.

We **LOVE**. **MOVE**. **RIZE**., together.



Pictured is the winner of our first Great Root Trail Race 11-Mile event– Brantley, an accomplished runner, seen helping a young aspiring runner, Emma, at our Love Never Ends Trail Race in 2024. Let's encourage one another.

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** Book Excerpt, "Forensics" coming Monday 3/31/25.*

You are transforming lives!

We are incredibly grateful for your generous gift and support. Your contribution makes our mission possible: to provide resources for grieving mothers and survivors of domestic abuse and trauma, as well as to offer scholarships to high school graduates in honor of R&G.

This year, we have partnered with **The Onsite Foundation, Haven of Hope, Sparrow Collective, First United Bank**, and many other organizations to make essential resources and programs accessible to those in need. A few of our future goals are to form a men's group led by men who have been impacted by this ministry and to acquire land where we can hold our events.

May God bless you and be your lifeline of love and hope as you LOVE. MOVE. RIZE.

The Great Root Movement: Ephesians 3:17 TLB - "And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts, living within you as you trust in him. May your **ROOTS** go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous LOVE."

Our LMR in 2025 fundraising campaign runs through March.

Scan our QR Code to give.



Share or give via our fundraising link: <https://givebutter.com/TGRMLMR25>

Thank you!

Love. Move. Rize.,

Karen A. Sparks

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Race Director, [Love Never Ends Trail Series](#)