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Lulu Pyne was 4 years old when she died in an accident nearly three years ago. Her mother, Gretchan, visits her daughter's grave twice a month.

Life after Lulu

A family remakes itself.

Second of two parts

It was a dreary, drizzly day back in March 2001, the time of year when New England turns from snow to mud. The landscape was sheathed in monochromatic gray, not a bloom or bud in sight. As she drove home from an errand, Gretchan Pyne's spirits sagged. "What a rotten day," she said. In the back seat of the car, 3-year-old Lulu had donned a pair of plastic rose-colored glasses her father had recently bought her.

"Mama, look!" she said. "The whole world looks pink! Try them on."

The cranky mother told the child to leave her alone while she drove. Then she looked in the rearview mirror and saw Lulu's crestfallen face. When they pulled into the driveway, Gretchan dutifully took the glasses. "Wow!" she exclaimed. "The world really does look better!"

"Lulu, can I have these?" she asked.

The girl shook her head. "No, Mama, you have to find your own."



That night, her mother jotted down the story in her journal. It was this simple yet profound message from a small child that would end up, in a way, saving Gretchan Pyne's life.

Right after Lulu died, her mother found her rose-colored glasses. They now sit on a windowsill in her bedroom. "I don't wash them," Gretchan says, "because her fingerprints are on them."

Gretchan Pyne had been with her daughter in the ambulance and feared the worst. As Dr. Craig Cornwall worked on Lulu at Cape Cod Hospital, Gretchan was forced to face the horrible truth. But Warren Pyne could not, would not, accept it. Hadn't his daughter been dancing in the parking lot of Bob's Sub & Cone in Wellfleet only an hour earlier, so full of life that he got out his video camera to capture the moment?

But as he filmed, Lulu stepped up on the ledge of a metal

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LIFE AFTER LULU

'Lulu's love will heal us all'

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bike rack and pointed to the double rainbow that had risen from the misty afternoon. The rack, which was not anchored, flipped over on her, crushing her chest and heart.

"By the time Warren and the boys got to the hospital, it was just holy terror. There is no other word," says Gretchan. "It was a living, breathing hell." Warren's parents had arrived from Brockton and were helping with the dazed 9-year-old twins, Drew and Dylon.

In the emergency room, Warren was beside himself. "Do something!" he pleaded. At one point, the 6-foot-4, 240-pound man lifted the doctor off the floor. "What am I supposed to do?" the father wailed. He asked to see Lulu, who lay in a trauma room off the ER. There he remained for hours, holding and hugging her. Finally, as her body began to deteriorate, Cornwall gently told him it was time to say goodbye. "I didn't want to leave her," Warren says. "I did not want to let go and give up. I still don't want to let go and give up."

The doctor gave the couple an anti-anxiety drug to help them sleep. He also gave them some advice. "The only thing I can tell you is that you just have to continue to do what you do. Whatever it is you do, go home and do it. Don't get so obsessed with your loss that you give up your life."

Unable to return to a house without Lulu, the Pynes went back to the motel room they had booked for their beach weekend in Truro. In bed, Gretchan moaned and wept and tossed and turned. At 5 a.m., Warren found her wandering in a nearby graveyard. "Cars were going by, and I couldn't help thinking that the world should come to an end," says Gretchan, "that people shouldn't be going to work."

When the sun came up, Warren gathered some of Lulu's stuffed animals and took them to the morgue. Workers accepted the toys but would not allow him inside. For hours, he sat in the parking lot. It didn't feel right that his little girl should be alone. The boys were in shock, too. Drew told a family friend that the double rainbow over the parking lot when Lulu died was God's way of welcoming her into heaven. Dylon, the quieter twin, wrote that "her purpose in life was to make people that were mean turn kind."

The death of a child is the saddest of all; a miniature casket is an unnatural sight. Gretchan's best friend, Lynn Bliss, remembers Gretchan sobbing: "How can I pick out a casket for my baby when she hasn't even had a big girl bed?" Gretchan insisted on doing Lulu's hair for the final time. Then she slipped her high school ring onto her daughter's finger. At the wake, she passed out.

After Lulu died, local florists ran out of flowers. For the funeral, two police departments — Easton and Wareham — blocked off

roads. Dragonfly pins were handed out for everyone to wear. The soloist sang Lulu's favorite lullaby, and her rose-colored glasses were displayed.

Warren's mother, Joanne, read the eulogy that Gretchan had written: "Of all the things Lulu loved, she loved people the most. As much as she loved the earth and all things in it, she loved the human spirit the most. And that is what made Lulu an angel. She knew what it takes most people a lifetime to figure out."

In the days that followed, Gretchan would go down to the beach, watch the sun rise, and write about her daughter. One morning, it came to her: Their beach lot would become a memorial garden. Warren found her out there digging furiously. Soon he joined in. For two weeks, in 90-degree weather, they worked day and night. Finally, Lulu's Rainbow Garden was finished. The sign says: "Angels and butterflies welcome." Lulu loved "flutterbies," and last year the family held a butterfly release there.

At first, Warren and Gretchan Pyne found it difficult to eat, sleep, even breathe. They were, says Gretchan, "like the living dead." She lost her keys, only to find them in the refrigerator. While the boys were at school, she'd curl up on Lulu's floor. Warren stayed home for two weeks; his chiropractic fraternity brothers flew in from all over to cover his practice. When he returned to work, there would be times when he was so overcome with grief that he couldn't walk.

That last image of the bike rack still haunts him, and always will. "I was only 20 feet away," he says. "I couldn't stop it."

The couple say they never got an apology from anyone at Bob's Sub & Cone. They have three years to file a lawsuit; the deadline is up next month. Warren will only say: "You would think it would be bolted down, that a 4-year-old couldn't tip it over." According to a report in a local newspaper, shop owner Robert Nelson had the rack destroyed right after the accident. Nelson declined to be interviewed by the Globe "because it's still ongoing."

After Lulu's death, the Pynes did all the things the books say to do. They went for grief counseling. Warren and Gretchan joined a bereavement group but did not find comfort in other people's pain. The boys had their own group. They all participated in energy-healing reiki sessions. Gretchan tried an antidepressant, but it made her groggy. Acupuncture helped. She saw a spiritual counselor.

Warren, a fitness buff, began working out maniacally. His counselor told him to focus his pain and anger as he was lifting, and then release it. Once, a stranger at the gym told him: "You're working out so intensely. Are you trying to kill yourself?"

For weeks, he would go to the cemetery every night, lie down on



In Lulu's room, the bed is still piled with her dolls; the sheets have not been changed. Gretchan Pyne, sitting in the rocking chair where she nursed Lulu, used the room to write a book about a poignant day with her daughter.

Lulu's grave, and pray she'd return. "I know on one hand that it can't happen," he says. "But my other side tells me God can do anything, that we could go back to that parking lot and she'd get up and be OK." He still goes several times a week to sing her favorite songs, such as "The Highland Goat."

He sold his beloved boat, which the family lived on during weekends. It was too painful a reminder of Lulu. Drew told his mother: "I've lost two of the things I loved the most — Lulu and the ocean."

Gretchan attended graduation at Best Friends Preschool and watched as Lulu's friends received their diplomas. The yearbook and classroom were dedicated to Lulu. Her classmates wrote: "Lulu liked spinning in her dresses. Lulu always shared her toys with us. She liked singing the Good Morning song very loud. She will always be our best friend. We love her." Gretchan, a talented artist, painted the room with rainbows and butterflies.

Shortly before she died, Lulu's class had been asked to draw a picture of what they wanted to be when they grew up. Lulu drew a stick figure of Gretchan. "My Mommy," she had the teacher write under it.

"I feel I have to be the best woman I can be, for her and for me," Gretchan says. "It would be so easy sometimes to curl up and die. But I feel it would be doing Lulu the worst disservice. I wouldn't be honoring her at all."



After Lulu died, Gretchan and Warren Pyne made a memorial garden for her on their beach lot in Wareham. Last month, the Pyne family sat together by her garden.

Indeed, the couple has two good reasons for getting out of bed each morning: Drew and Dylon. "Thank God for the boys," says their mother. They are 12 now, and though they don't talk about Lulu's death, they do like to talk about Lulu, who called them "my guys." They talk about how they'd push her on her Big Wheel or their skateboards. About her love of Cheetos and how she ate parmesan cheese by the handful. About how she was learning to swing and loved to walk on her tiptoes.

Though each boy wants his own bedroom, they would not dream of taking over Lulu's. Her bed remains piled with Barney and Lamb Chop and dolls. The sheets have not been changed since she left that day for the beach. Her pajamas are tucked under the pillow. "I can still smell her," says Gretchan, holding the flannel nightgown to her nose. "When she had a fever, she smelled like burnt cotton candy."

Whenever friends bring their kids over, Gretchan invites them to Lulu's room to play. "It's a way of celebrating her energy and her things," she says. Recently, Lynn Bliss's 5-year-old daughter — like Lulu, blond and blue-eyed — sat on the floor and played with Lulu's dollhouse, along with Gretchan. "Do you want to be the mommy or the baby?" Gretchan asked. Though it can be painful, she says she feels joy in the presence of little girls.

Lulu's room has had a healing role in another way, too. A year ago, Gretchan moved a desk in, and it is now the home of Lulu

Belle Books, which recently published "Lulu's Rose Colored Glasses." It's the story of the gray, cheerless March day before Lulu died, as seen through a child's hopeful prism. On the back is a photo of the entire family with the words: "Real love stories never have endings."

Perhaps more than anything else, the book has helped mend the Pyne family. "A little girl taught me that the world is how you choose to see it," says Gretchan. "I can choose to be depressed, miserable, grumpy, and horrible. Or I can choose to fight my way back and find happiness again." Whenever she signs a book, she writes Lulu's name next to hers.

The book quickly became a family project. Warren was in charge of finding the rose-colored glasses that would be tied to each one. They hired a Brockton company to print the book, which is illustrated by Anne Carrozza-Remick, a friend of Gretchan's. Then the women went knocking on bookstore doors, looking for shelf space. Some told them they didn't sell self-published books. But a surprising number — from small independents to giants like Barnes & Noble — said yes. Their first thousand books sold out quickly, and another 3,500 are nearly gone.

Gretchan is thrilled. "People buy it for adults who have illnesses, for parents who lost children. They're in hospitals and hospices and in schools," she says. One man bought books to take to an orphanage in Bangkok and an

HIV clinic in Costa Rica. A woman with ovarian cancer bought the book for her granddaughter; when the woman died recently, everyone wore rose-colored glasses to her funeral. Dr. Cornwall bought several copies for friends. Gretchan has written five more Lulu books that are waiting to be illustrated.

Gretchan, who nearly flunked high school speech class because she was so terrified of public speaking, is being asked to talk publicly about grief and coping. She is amazed that people want to hear her, and more amazed at the words that flow from her heart to her mouth. The boys accompany her to signings, handing out fliers in the stores and malls. Warren is happy that part of the proceeds are going to a scholarship in Lulu's name at his alma mater, the Palmer College of Chiropractic in Davenport, Iowa.

"Fear doesn't control my life anymore," says Gretchan. "When you have a child who dies... what else is there to be afraid of?" She quickly answers her own question. "God forbid, you have the fear of losing another child." She and Warren both worry more about the boys now. "Because you know the worst can happen," she says.

Lulu's presence looms large in the Pynes' gray raised ranch. Her framed face is everywhere. Sometimes, her mother absent-mindedly sets the table for five. Each night, they light a candle at what had been her place at the table. Every fifth of July, they make a birthday cake, add another

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Gretchan reads from "Lulu's Rose Colored Glasses" at a Starbucks in May. "A little girl taught me that the world is how you choose to see it," she says.



From left: Drew, Warren, Gretchan, and Dylon Pyne on the beach behind their house. "The only way to honor the person you lost is to find your happiness again, and to carry the person with you," Gretchan says.

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candle, and set off fireworks for Lulu.

But they have also begun to build new memories. After they sold the boat, they bought a piece of land in Vermont, far from the ocean Lulu so loved. They spend many weekends there, including Mother's Day this year. In an e-mail to friends, Gretchan wrote that she felt Lulu's presence strongly that day: "All three of my children were with me, and I know that we're going to be okay. I believe that Lulu's love will heal us all. I am so lucky to have been her mother on her short stay..."

Still, nearly three years later, the road to recovery is pitted with potholes; they try to pull one another out. "When Dad has a bad Lulu day, we talk to him and give him big hugs," says Dylon. "Or we tell him something funny she did and about the good times we had." Gretchan and Warren employ the same technique: lots of "hug therapy" and talking. They know that a huge percentage of marriages end after a child dies.

"One of the worst things we find is the parents feel so terrible about the whole thing that they turn on each other," says Jacqueline Olds, a child psychiatrist at McLean and Massachusetts General hospitals. "The other part

that's so traumatic is that everyone has terrible flashbacks, and it scares them to death. Families need to hold each other literally and figuratively."

The Pynes can't imagine not sharing their burden with one another. Who else could possibly identify? Warren holds his wife and tells her he understands. "I can't say it'll be OK," he says, "because that's not true." They try to take turns with their grief. "There have been a few times when we both sank down to misery at the same time," he says. "That's difficult."

The twins would love to have another sister, but Gretchan, 41, has been loathe to try. Her pregnancies and deliveries were difficult. "I could not stand another loss," she says. She and Warren would both love another little girl, and are discussing adoption.

Recovery comes in baby steps. Warren, who adores the ocean, has begun to look at boating magazines again. Gretchan takes pleasure in the small things: planting another hydrangea in Lulu's garden, watching the boys on the tire swing, helping Warren build a swing set. "The only way to honor the person you lost is to find your happiness again, and to carry the person with you," she says.

'It becomes part of who you are. You can't possibly be the same person you were before.'

GRETCHAN PYNE

While the twins have grown to be wiry sixth-graders, Lulu, who would have been 7 next month, will always remain 4 years old to her family: a little girl in a tutu and tiara who still loved her "blankie."

Recently, Gretchan met an 80-year-old woman at a book signing who lost a child decades ago. "I could see the pain in her eyes, still," she says. Gretchan knows the hurt is a wound: It can scab over, but the scar will never disappear.

"It becomes part of who you are," she says. "You can't possibly be the same person you were before. It's like these young men who go off to war and they come back different. They're not innocent anymore. You know such deep, deep pain exists, and it brings you to this whole different level of humanness. We will absolutely have to deal with this all of our lives."

It has helped her to believe things happen for a purpose — that Lulu's brief life was about spreading love, that her death was about becoming an angel. "I don't believe God picks kids off," she says, firmly. "If I thought her death was just some random thing, how could I go on?"

She constantly prays for signs: "Lulu, let me know you're there, let me know I'm doing the right thing."

Recently, as she stood on her deck, she saw a double rainbow — the first she'd seen since that horrific evening three years ago. She grabbed a camera and herded Warren and the twins down to the beach. The rainbow seemed to

start at their property, stretch across the harbor, and end at the cemetery where Lulu is buried.

Tears streamed down her face. Warren blinked his back. "Thank you, Lulu, thank you," her mother said.

Gretchan Pyne will sign copies of "Lulu's Rose Colored Glasses" tomorrow at 6 p.m. at Borders in Hyannis, and Saturday from noon-4 p.m. at Zoinks in Faneuil Hall.

This series was reported through extensive interviews with the Pyne family and other sources. The scenes from 2001, including the quotes from Lulu, were reconstructed through eyewitness interviews.