



My name is Maggie. Unfortunately, my story is not uncommon. On June 18, 2020, two police officers knocked on our door to tell us that our 22 year old son, Cormac, had been found in an abandoned field in Lombard - dead from an overdose. This came after a nine-year battle with anxiety, depression, trauma, and addiction.

Cormac was a freckled Irish ginger. He was funny, quirky, and a hard worker. He was a son, a brother, a football player, wrestler, coach, and a friend to all. He adored his Irish roots, Phish, Jam bands, nice clothes, Xbox, and great taco places. He loved his family wholeheartedly. Cormac touched the lives of everyone he met.



When Cormac was in a good place, he spoke to groups of people about his journey. I always told him, "You are as powerful as your story, which has a mighty voice that touches people to the core." He always championed the underdog. Cormac had a knack for finding those struggling the most and went out of his way to help or befriend them. He made people feel included and special. He loved others fiercely, compassionately, and unconditionally. I never knew anyone who stumbled so many times yet had the courage to get up again and fight harder.

Cormac found a way of sneaking into your heart and staying there. He was so loved but struggled to love himself first and foremost or feel worthy of all the love people had for him. I am sharing this message with you today in the hopes that my son did not die in vain. I believe that, somehow, his courageous struggle had a purpose and can help someone else rewrite their story.



I am standing on the strong shoulders of my courageous Cormac to create good out of tragedy, and to give traction to others battling and struggling as he did. We are heartbroken beyond words. We love him and miss him terribly. Cormac's struggle has ended, but his story has not.

The message of MAC is to find Meaning, Affirmation and Commitment to oneself. It is a message of finding worthiness in your world.

**M** **Meaningful:** Having meaning. Significant; relevant; important; worthwhile; purposeful.

**A** **Affirmation:** The action or process of affirming something. Declaration; proclamation.

**C** **Compassion & Commitment:** Fellow feeling, empathy, understanding. The quality of being dedicated to a cause, activity, a pledge or undertaking. Loyalty; faithfulness; adherence; attentiveness

I believe the message of our Cormac has the power to touch everyone (just as he did) no matter the root or depth of your challenges. The greatest gift you can give yourself is believing in your worth – know that you are worthy. No matter the poor choices, stumbles or mistakes made, things can always be changed, rectified, or at best, amended. This does not come quickly or easily, but it can happen.

You are worthy of peace, happiness, and health. You are worthy of the fight and the effort to get better and all that comes with it. Share your pain, your fears and your struggles. REACH OUT. Emotionally connect with someone around you. YOU ARE NOT ALONE! If you keep silent, it will engulf you from the inside out. Secrets breed shame, and shame makes no room for peace. You must be able to forgive yourself. Forgiveness takes introspection, courage, and accountability. Remember you are worth the sometimes uncomfortable and bumpy road to inner peace.



Cormac was an easy person to love, but at times a difficult child to parent. In eight years, there was the gamut of bad choices with severe and steep consequences. There is collateral damage from poor choices, but relationships can be repaired with faith and hard work. Rebuilding trust takes time. Healing can happen. Realize tough love is LOVE. It is not a rejection or punishment, and it does not have to be permanent. It is the most challenging, yet selfless, gift a parent or loved one can give you. Tough love can take on many forms. It is emotional self-preservation for your loved ones until you can get to a place of healing and stability. Its purpose is to put you on the road to those who can walk that part of the journey with you.



Cormac loved big and unconditionally all those whom he met, yet he had difficulty feeling worthy or being able to receive all the love and opportunities given to him. He struggled to love inwardly and believe that he was enough. I am here to tell you that he was enough, as are all of you.

# **MAC's Message "Everyday Find A Way"**

## **MEANINGFUL**

I challenge you to find one thing each day that gives you purpose. Big or small, it does not matter. This could be simply getting out of bed and making it. It could be knocking off something on a "to do" list, working out, or doing something for someone else. Purposeful actions build on themselves. Be open to the meaning in small things – they help you gain momentum and direction. Continue to build your emotional chain daily.

## **AFFIRMATION**

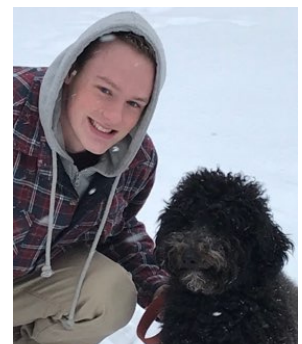
You are significant beyond words, remember that! Learn to forgive yourself, no matter how many tries it takes. Realize that you deserve the opportunities to betterment. Cormac was a silent but valiant warrior (like many of you) who fought through obstacle after obstacle his entire life. His courage was commendable. I challenge you to say out loud one thing about yourself you like, love or are grateful for. You are worthy, and you are worth fighting for! Commit to your emotional health every day. No matter what you struggle with, "emotional well-being" requires constant attention and work. Affirm others when they cannot, and in turn, allow yourself to accept the affirmations others send your way. Learn to accept and love yourself - past mistakes and all. "There is a nobility in compassion, a beauty in empathy, a grace in forgiveness." - John Connolly. I love this quote because I think it speaks to what we can give to others so freely, but have such difficulty applying to ourselves. All three are valuable keys to our inner peace.

## COMMITMENT

We all need to commit to our emotional welfare, every day. Some days are easier than others. Emotional health will be different things to different people, and that is ok. Make yourself vulnerable to that process. To quote Brene Brown, "Vulnerably is not winning or losing; it's having the courage to show up when we have no control over the outcome. Vulnerability is not weakness; it's our greatest measure of courage." Whatever or however you are feeling must be acknowledged. Do not put on the mask of "I'm great" or "I'm good" when you are not. Do not numb those feelings away. To hide or push down those feelings protects no one, including all who love and support you. This only leads to further unresolved pain. My mom taught me, "God gave you a voice so never be afraid to use it." Your journeys and stories are real and powerful. Give a voice to your pain, fear, sadness, or loneliness - do not retreat from these. Do not place a mask over these. Do not numb these. Commitment requires you to have an open line of communication, a connection. Every day, name one person you can reach out to who you can honestly open up to (day or night). I beg you to trust that someone with your feelings. You have more people in your corner than you realize. You never know when that connection could be lifesaving.

Our courageous Cormac compassionately touched the lives of everyone he met and lives in our hearts forever. I humbly hope you will allow the message of **MAC** to live in yours.

Rest easy buddy, I've got it from here...



## About The Author



Maggie Burke is a loving mother of three, dedicated Neonatal Intensive Care Unit nurse, Ironman triathlete, and fierce advocate for addiction and mental health awareness. Happily married to her best friend of 27 years, Maggie and her husband Kevin reside in the western suburbs of Chicago.