

Q & A with
LINDY BOONE MICHAELIS

Author of *Heaven Hears*

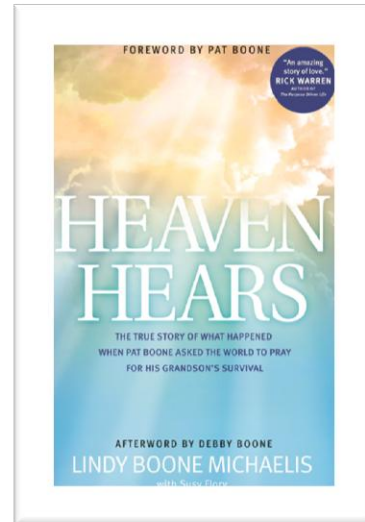
Lindy, yours is a book that no mom really wants to write because it's in response to an experience that no parent ever wants to have. Please describe what happened to your oldest son, Ryan, on June 19, 2001.

Ryan wanted to get some sun that afternoon. He and his friend and roommate Steve went up to the roof of their apartment building, and Ryan stepped on a skylight that was not protected with any border or railing. He stepped over it but not quite far enough to support his weight, and he fell three stories to a concrete surface in the courtyard of the building. Ryan was bleeding and unconscious, and his roommate Steve fortunately was there to call 911. They lived close to UCLA Medical Center and the paramedics arrived quickly, but we learned later that Ryan was not expected to survive the injuries he sustained. His lungs collapsed, his spleen burst, and he incurred massive internal bleeding. Ryan's jaw was broken and a couple of ribs cracked. All his internal organs were traumatized and he labored to breathe. Ryan's heart stopped a couple of times as medical professionals fought to save his life, and the huge concern was whether he had been deprived of oxygen for too long. And then of course no one can fall three stories and have that kind of impact without incurring a very serious injury to the brain. Ryan's spleen was removed, his bones have healed, and his other organs have become stable again, but he is still on his recovery journey from a traumatic brain injury.

One of your darkest moments was when you were airborne on your way back to California and had no idea what would await you when you arrived. How did you handle the sense of helplessness you felt?

As it became more and more clear to me what I had been told about Ryan's accident—and that the doctors and nurses couldn't even risk moving him to the imaging room for a CT scan—I knew that his life was hanging by a thread. I felt unbearably trapped in that plane.

Then I had a thought. I absolutely had to write or I would explode and have a meltdown in front of everybody. My hand started pouring out the feelings of my heart on the back of one of my husband's work papers from his briefcase. My words were a mixture of my heart emotions and my passionate prayers to God to help me face what I was about to walk into. I begged him not let the pain be for no purpose.



What was your life like prior to Ryan’s accident? We know you grew up in a famous entertainment family. Tell us how being a Boone prepared you to face the unthinkable.

I grew up in the real 90210 on the corner of Beverly Drive and Sunset Blvd, right across the street from the iconic Beverly Hills Hotel. I always knew that my dad, Pat Boone, was famous and beloved by loads of fans everywhere we went. But at home, my parents were very down to earth and normal. They worked hard to keep us from feeling entitled or spoiled. My three sisters and I had structure and rules and chores and never missed a church service unless we were sick. I was a very happy, content child and I truly meant it when I accepted Jesus at a young age.

I was 12 years old when I was baptized. I had watched my parents go through marital difficulties and witnessed a transformation in them, in their marriage and in their relationship to the Lord. Our faith took on more relevance to our day-to-day lives and became more than just about being “good” and attending church. Nothing truly prepares you in advance to handle pain, but it is so important to be grounded in the Word of God.

When I hit the first major crisis of my life at age 45, I can’t say I was prepared but I had the tools available. I decided to plunge into all I had believed about God, prayer, faith, and healing and learn to use those tools more often and more skillfully. I immersed myself in God’s presence in order to regain my footing. I put what I had been taught to the test, and when I did that, my parents’ beliefs became more my own. It’s not hard to believe in a loving, all powerful God when you live in a Beverly Hills mansion, go to private school, and have every material need met as soon as it arises. But when faith has been tested, then it becomes yours. You cannot deny it when God comes to *your* rescue.

If “it takes a village to raise a child,” then you must have relied on the support of family and friends to assist with Ryan’s ongoing care. Tell us about that.

At first Ryan was so very fragile. He was in six facilities over a ten-month period. My mother and I shared the time at each facility during the day. I was there for six hours, and she spent six hours, and we overlapped our shifts so we had some time together each day. At night another family member, my husband Mike, Ryan’s dad Doug, his stepmom Vic, and other family and friends would sit with Ryan for three hours or so before a paid caregiver would come to stay the night and keep watch. Hospital staffs are stretched thin, and I couldn’t bear to have Ryan be alone, trapped without the ability to communicate and nobody with him to notice if he was in distress.

We brought him home as soon as we could modify our home for a wheelchair and shower that could work downstairs. Ryan’s condition was still so complicated that our insurance allowed a high level of in-home nursing care. It felt as if we had the benefits of the hospital in our home. I prayed for God to bring us the right caregivers who would be with us day in and day out after the nursing care ran out, and I know that our prayers were heard and answered in such a sweet way. God brought us James and Joseph to work with Ryan from the time we brought him home, and later Chris joined us, to round out a three-person team of caregivers. We had been warned that keeping good caregivers was one of the challenges that we would face, but in our case Ryan has had amazing men that I believe were sent to us. They have the biggest hearts and really have bonded with Ryan. After 8 years Joseph moved away, but he left us in good hands with his brother-in-law Erwin. We feel blessed because Ryan has had such great guys to help him.

Larry King has been a longtime friend of your family's, and early on he asked you and your dad to come on his network TV show to talk about Ryan's accident and ask viewers to pray. Why did you decide to appear on *Larry King Live*, and what was the response?

At the first request, I told my dad I couldn't do the show and he should go on without me. I didn't feel I could expose my pain and raw wound to the world. It felt too personal. But after thinking it over for a short while, I thought about what Ryan would want me to do. He loved the Lord. He believed God was going to use his life to point others toward Him. I believed in the power of prayer and realized this was a huge opportunity to ask the world to pray for Ryan. If Ryan hadn't been in a coma and we could have talked about it, I knew he would have told me to go on and lift up Jesus and ask for prayer.

I had recently read about Jesus praying aloud for his friend Lazarus, who had already died. Jesus publicly said, *"Father, I thank You that You have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here that they may believe that you sent me."* After this he called Lazarus from the grave and he lived! Even Jesus prayed in public for the benefit of the people there watching him. If he thought it was important to pray in public in his own pain (he had wept for his friend), I thought I was being signaled to go on that live broadcast and ask God to heal my son aloud and in faith.

Your book is called *Heaven Hears*. Given the fact that Ryan's health has not yet been completely restored, what are some of the ways in which you feel that God has heard and answered your prayers?

I would so much like to have written this book with a different ending. I would love to report that Ryan miraculously got up out of his wheelchair and started walking, and that his behavior straightened out completely and his memory returned 100 percent intact. But when I look at the Bible as a whole, I see that some answers to prayer were a long time coming.

Sometimes God's promises aren't immediately evidenced, and there are many Scriptures to point out why that could be. James 1:2-4 talks about considering it pure joy when you face trials because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance which must finish its work so that we may be mature and complete.

My pastor, Rick Warren, often says that God is much more interested in our character than our comfort. This recovery journey with Ryan has grown the faith of every one of us in our family and caused us to go deeper in God. Ryan is still coming back to us. As we sat in the waiting room for weeks and weeks, we often put together jigsaw puzzles to pass the time. I think of Ryan like that, being put back together, piece by piece, and it's so satisfying when another piece is found and slides into place. And with each piece I see the Ryan I know coming back, smiling at me. Each night Ryan and I both speak words of restoration to his brain, his body, and his behavior. I know heaven hears us call the Kingdom of heaven to earth. In the Kingdom, Ryan is already completely whole, and we are calling the manifestation of his wholeness to earth. I'm seeing it happen before my eyes, yet in the process, God is making all of us who are waiting and believing to be more mature and complete ourselves.

If this story was yours and Ryan's alone, you would not have written a book. What advice do you have for others who have faced tragic circumstances within their families?

I wanted to write a book that I could share with families who are in that darkest part of their lives, afraid and confused. I know how it feels to have your world turned upside with nothing that makes sense. It's lonely, and you feel that nobody can really understand the isolation. People come around but unless they have experienced that phone call about a beloved being hurt who is hanging between this life and the next, they don't know what to say and can't relate. But there were a few people who reached out to me who *did* know, for they had been there. These were survivors who came to comfort and encourage me.

I also sought out books that offered hope about people who had suffered TBI (traumatic brain injury) and had better outcomes than doctors were telling them to expect. In many cases doctors take away your hope by telling you "what the odds are." They don't want you to be disappointed but rather pleasantly surprised if your loved one has a better outcome. But the nurses and often therapists offered stories of hope.

Ryan's story will offer hope to many people. Some may not want to hear that he's not perfectly healed yet. That's not the story they are looking for. I may have had that attitude early on. But some families would be delighted to see their loved one make the progress that Ryan has made. They need to have hope that their loved one can get better than they may have been led to believe and that they themselves will smile again. I didn't think I ever would.

I want people to know that when their foundation is shaken and it all comes crumbling down, they cannot rely on medical specialists or their own strength of will. The only sure place they can stand is on is God's Word. We can place our confidence in His unique ability to take our rubble and broken pieces and rebuild something amazingly beautiful. I want others to know that they can fight but to fight the right enemy—take the battle to their knees and know that they have heaven's armies to back them up.

You and your family have begun a nonprofit foundation to help survivors of brain injury and their families. Tell us about Ryan's Reach and the ways in which Ryan's own story is still unfolding.

We know we are fortunate because Ryan received a settlement after his accident which allows us to be able to afford caregivers. We are in the minority, though, and most mothers and fathers *are* the caregivers. We started Ryan's Reach so that we can address the needs of families who have exhausted their resources and energy and need help.

Ryan attends High Hopes Head Injury Program in Tustin, California—a day program for people over 18 years of age who have suffered a traumatic brain injury or stroke. We raise money primarily through two annual fundraisers which provide scholarships so others can attend this great program. High Hopes is a nonprofit, but it still requires approximately \$2,600 a month to attend the program full-time. This is nothing compared to facilities that are for-profit. Most of the students at High Hopes are in no position to pay this, so they are in need of funding. We assist as many as we can, but we want to do so much more. Our vision includes increasing the numbers of scholarships we can fund and helping High Hopes grow to be able to accept more students. We also foresee a respite care element to our foundation, allowing parents and spouses to get a break. Many parents haven't had a vacation or even a date night in a long, long time as it's hard to trust others with the complicated needs of someone with TBI.

The two annual fundraisers are the *Pat Boone and Friends Golf Classic* and the *Annual Dove Dash and Pancake Breakfast*. To learn more about Ryan's Reach, go to www.ryansreach.com.