

An interview with Linda Znachko, Author of *He Knows Your Name*



When the evening news reported an abandoned baby had been found dead in a local dumpster, Linda Znachko's comfortable life changed. She was suddenly convicted, knowing God wanted her to provide a dignified burial for this tiny lost child. She obeyed, having no idea where that first small yes would lead. *He Knows Your Name: How One Abandoned Baby Inspired Me to Say Yes to God* (Kregel Publications/September 27, 2016/ISBN: 9780825444043/\$14.99) chronicles Znachko's journey and challenges the reader to say yes to the Holy Spirit's leading, no matter how insignificant or strange it may seem.

Q: Your book, *He Knows Your Name*, tells of how your ministry by the same name got started. Tell us a little bit about how the news story about an abandoned baby inspired you to say yes to God's plan for you.

It was a headline about Baby Doe, wearing a diaper and found in a dumpster, that grabbed my heart. God spoke to my spirit with a contrasting message — Doe is not a name, a diaper is not burial clothing and a dumpster is not a grave. God's plan for me was to make this injustice right. I had no idea how that would look; I only knew I needed to call and ask some questions. When I asked what would happen to this child if never claimed and was told "nothing," my "yes" turned into action to make sure the child would be named, dressed and buried with dignity.

Q: While anyone who watched the news or read the story of the abandoned would have certainly found it to be a terrible situation, you were struck on a deeper level. What was it about this baby that called you to action?

My mother died four months prior to this child's abandonment. I was responsible for planning her funeral, which meant I ordered her headstone, helped choose her burial clothes, delivered them to the funeral home and planned her funeral service. I felt compelled to honor this child in the same way I had honored my mother. I wanted to be family for this child who was orphaned in death.

Q: Were your family and friends supportive of your mission to provide a funeral and burial for the baby? How did your husband react?

My husband was supportive right away. When I told him about the child in the news and about the conversations I had with the coroner's office, he understood my need to advocate for the baby. We talked a lot about the uncharted waters I was entering into, and he encouraged me to press into the unknowns. My friends were a bit speechless about my relentless pursuit of justice. They wondered about my qualifications to meet with government officials and talk with the detectives about the case. When I said I wasn't technically qualified but was finding many open doors to my quest, they were very supportive.

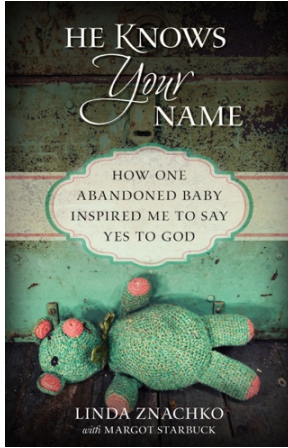
Q: How did the painful experience of losing your mother while dealing with your daughter's life-threatening illness prepare you for what God was asking you to do?

I was on my face daily in prayer with a deep desperation that allowed me to hear the voice of God very clearly. Walking with God when life and death were hanging in the balance meant my priorities were uncluttered. I was an advocate for my mother throughout her battle with cancer, and I was an advocate for my daughter during her illness. God had prepared me to be an advocate in hard places, so it really wasn't a big leap to advocate for the baby. The awkward part was the how.

Q: Your journey began with wanting to provide a funeral for one abandoned baby but quickly grew into something much larger. Share with us the call you received while waiting to hear back about Baby Doe.

Alfie, the coroner, asked me about another need when we were talking on what had become our weekly Friday morning calls. She asked me plainly if "my organization" could provide a headstone for an under-resourced family. In my head I said to myself, "What organization?" I asked her if I could call her back because I had to ask the Lord if this request had my name on it. It was that phone call that started to shape the idea in

me that God was expanding my heart for more of His purposes. It was also when I realized that naming “my organization” was my next step.



Q: Why was it so important to give the child a name? Can you explain how the ministry and book name came to be?

Names give legitimacy to life. A name gives purpose, identify and meaning to a child who otherwise would be hidden. God Himself has named us. We are written on the palms of His hands. God's character attributes are named because it brings fullness to who He is. A child's name gives definition to his or her existence.

When Alfie first asked me about my organization, I asked God about this in my heart of hearts, and He clearly directed me to see He was birthing a ministry. I knew then I needed to have a name. He Knows Your Name came to me like a song, and it felt like a covering over me. It has been confirmed so many times that anointing is on the name of my ministry. People respond to it all the time without knowing anything about it. I have had several people stop me in the airport when they see it on my phone case,

and they say, "I love that!" or, "I know He does!" It opens many opportunities for conversations with strangers about what it means to them to be known by God.

From the beginning I thought it made sense to have the title of this book be *He Knows Your Name*. It captures the heart of God for His children and reminds us we are all His precious ones.

Q: What other situations have you and your ministry been able to assist with?

I have provided headstones for families who are under-resourced, and I give a headstone blessing dedication for the family. I also have established a foundation at Indy Parks in the name of a child who drowned. For six years, we have offered a free session of swim lessons and water safety to inner city children so they can learn to swim. I'm currently advocating for the Baby Box legislation by giving testimony at the statehouse about the importance of enhancing the Safe Haven Law for awareness and alternative ways to surrender a baby safely.

I also help families who have lost a loved one in a violent crime organize memorials for their loved ones. I connect them with resources that help give dignity so death doesn't have the last word, but redemption of life does! One family is putting a bench at a park, near where a girl was found after being killed. The bench has her name engraved on a plaque, and the bench brings beauty to the park.

Q: *He Knows Your Name* is full of the imagery of God as a Father. How did that aspect of God's character influence you to reach out to these families?

Psalm 68:6 says, "God sets the lonely in families," and John 14:18 says, "I will not leave you as orphans." These two verses are foundational for me as I consider what it means to live out the gospel in my community. In dark times of grief, the enemy strikes hard with a spirit of isolation. I feel as a follower of Jesus I need to stand in the gap with families in crisis by bringing the Light. Light always overpowers darkness, and my presence is a powerful gift when loneliness sets in because of loss. I believe with all my heart that death, the method God used for salvation, is the vehicle He uses to bring about life. So when I stand at the grave with families, I know the hope of life is in the story of the resurrection. I tell them they are loved by their Heavenly Father, who knows how they feel, and only He can heal their broken hearts.

Q: Explain how your definition of "family" has changed through this process.

I have four biological children, and it wasn't until I adopted babies in death that I understood how much I could love a child I didn't carry. The carrying in my heart and claiming through fighting the systems of justice was every bit as laborious for me. Naming a child is a parental right that gives authority, so when I name a baby, I feel the inheritance of family fill my legacy. Another dynamic of "family" that expanded for me was when others "adopted" me. Walking through the sacredness of suffering creates a forever bond, such as when families tell me I am family to them because we shared the intimacy of grief in the most difficult of losses — a child. Sometimes I am overwhelmed by the attachment others feel to me, but I have to say I have not felt taken advantage of by anyone I have served.

Q: How did you involve your husband and children in what God was leading you to do?

Sharing these amazing families and their stories with my husband and family has captured all of their hearts. Our kingdom value for sharing the gospel of Jesus by bringing light to the darkness of injustice has been a part of the fabric of our lives for a long time. My husband's ministry to Mission to Ukraine, our family's commitment to Safe Families of Indiana and many other opportunities have allowed us to serve together by engaging in the world around us. I have enjoyed watching each one use their unique gifts to love their neighbor by being available relationally. Their presence at my events show how much they care. My son recently moved back to be the senior pastor with Antioch Indy, and he has jumped in to the many opportunities to come alongside me, offering prayer, leadership and community to hurting families.

Q: How were you able to teach your children to engage in honoring these precious lives and providing dignity in their death, while protecting them from details they weren't ready to handle?

My youngest daughter, Caroline, was a sophomore in high school when I adopted Zachary (the first child we actually buried). I didn't feel she was too young to attend the funeral or understand the need I was acting upon. Many of her friends' moms supported us at the funeral and took the group of girlfriends out of school to attend. They provided the balloons with scripture verses on cards attached to the end of the strings. They handed out the balloons, and their participation was a gift to all of us. There is no better way to have honest conversations about hard things than at a grave. Talking with the girls about the value of every life was memorable and priceless!

Q: Each time God led you to minister to a family, you came upon potential spiritual, cultural and economic barriers. How have you been able break down those barriers and cultivate meaningful relationships?

Breakthrough happens every time I give the gift of time. Time has a profound way of tearing down all barriers. I used to think that "time, talent and treasures" had equal weight of importance in showing love to our neighbors. One of the foundational changes I have made during the growth of He Knows Your Name as a ministry is time is the most precious of all gifts. Most of the people I serve never ask me for money; they just want friendship. They want someone to stand with them. They long to be known. Nothing says, "I see you," like time spent together.

Q: How does sharing in the pain of others cause a ripple effect of healing?

Everyone has pain in his or her life. Living life honestly in community through the local church is God's way of helping us have a loving family around us for support and strength. God designed us to be the body of Jesus so we could bring the kingdom and be a taste of heaven to this broken world. When we live healed, whole, transformed lives, others can too. When we heal together, we live redeemed lives that are joyful rather than sorrowful. When we surround ourselves with healed people, we can extend reconciliation and restoration, resulting in hope. Hope births joy!

Q: What advice can you offer those who have friends or family walking through the devastating loss of a child? Are some things more helpful or hurtful than others?

I have found the fewer words, the better. Sit, listen and provide for basic needs. At the time of a tragic loss it is best not to share your own personal story. The depth of crisis is also not the time to say, "Something good will come from this loss" or "God needs another angel in heaven." It is helpful to field phone calls and help manage the media if it is necessary. Generally, families need to assign close friends with tasks so the family doesn't have to make too many decisions or talk with too many people. Helping make travel and other arrangements for out-of-town family is a big relief. Encouraging family to rely on hospital personnel for bereavement resources can be a terrific emotional support.

Q: What are a few ways believers can fulfill God's command to care for the widows and orphans in their community?

A wonderful way to support widows and orphans is simply with your time. You can also do so by spending time with the families of widows and adoptive families. Time is of so much more value than just sending a check, and

it is a great way to make a difference in the life of a lonely person. Asking questions about their needs, such as, "What do you need from me?" is a good first step. Find out if Safe Families operates in your state. If not, start a local chapter!

Orphans need spiritual families as well, not just "forever families." Be a mother or father, or a sister or brother to a lost child who needs transportation, tutoring or a fan at their athletic games!

Q: He Knows Your Name Ministry works to honor every child with a name in life and dignity in death. What are some ways people can partner with your ministry?

People can reach out to me through my website. I would love for them to tell me their story! So much healing happens through testimony and the revelation of redemption. Also, please send me information about what's happening in your local news. People find it funny that I don't read a lot of news, but I don't. I count on my community and communities around the country to be my eyes and ears on the street to keep me informed. Get involved with your local Safe Haven Law advocates. We need to educate young people about the law and support local organizations that are doing grassroots work to protect life.

Q: How can people find out more about He Knows Your Name Ministry, especially families suffering the loss of a child and are in need of assistance?

My website is the best way to connect with me. I have connections in many parts of the country I would love to share with under-resourced families. Facebook messenger is also an effective way to send me a story and need. There are great resources for bereavement in most hospitals, and I recommend families reach out to their local hospital for support and counseling. Sadly, grief counseling is not always a strength of the local church.

Learn more about more about He Knows Your Name and Linda Znachko at www.heknowsyourname.org, on [Facebook \(HeKnowsYourNameMinistry\)](#) and via [Twitter \(@LindaZnachko\)](#).