



NOAH ROBERTS

More Than a Wheelchair

The Woman Behind The Corina Mae Foundation

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The phone call came on a day that would forever divide my life into two parts.

Before.

And after.

No matter how much time passes, I will always remember that feeling. The realization that the strongest person I had ever known was gone.

My mother spent much of her life in a wheelchair. Many people saw that first. They saw her disability before they saw her determination, her humor, her compassion, and the quiet strength that carried her through countless challenges.

“People saw a wheelchair. I saw my mother.”

For every person who has ever been defined by what others see first.

- NOAH ROBERTS

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Introduction

When most people looked at my mother, they saw a wheelchair.

I saw a fighter.

I saw a woman who faced challenges most people would never understand and met them with dignity, determination, and grace. I saw someone who loved fiercely, laughed often, and never allowed her circumstances to define her worth.

To the world, she was Corina Mae Thompson.

To me, she was Mom.

This book is the story of the woman behind the wheelchair, the woman behind the foundation, and the legacy that continues to guide my life every day.

Her story deserves to be told.

And it begins here.

More Than What People Saw

When people first met my mother, they often noticed her wheelchair.

It was the first thing they saw.

For many, it became the first thing they assumed about her.

What they didn't see was the woman sitting in that chair. They didn't see her strength, her humor, her determination, or the way she could make someone feel welcome with just a few words. They didn't see the countless obstacles she faced every day or the courage it took to keep moving forward through them. They certainly didn't see the extraordinary legacy she would leave behind.

To me, she wasn't a woman in a wheelchair.

She was Mom.

My mother's name was Corina Mae Thompson. She was born on February 21, 1970, in Phoenix, Arizona. Her journey would not always be easy, but she lived it with a quiet dignity that inspired everyone fortunate enough to know her. While many people measure a life by accomplishments, titles, or wealth, my mother's life was measured by something much greater: the love she gave to others.

From the beginning, family was at the center of her world.

She loved deeply and without conditions. Whether she was spending

time with her siblings, talking with family members, or celebrating milestones with her nieces and nephews, she made each person feel important. She had a remarkable ability to listen without judgment and offer comfort without asking for anything in return.

That gift cannot be taught.

It simply lived within her.

People often speak about strength as though it is loud and visible. They picture heroes overcoming impossible odds or leaders standing before crowds. My mother's strength was different. It was quieter. It was found in her determination to face each day despite challenges that many people could never fully understand.

She experienced life through the lens of disability, but she never allowed disability to become her identity.

She understood hardship, yet she refused to let hardship make her bitter.

She understood limitations, yet she continued to dream.

She understood pain, yet she chose kindness.

That was who Corina Mae Thompson was.

Looking back now, I realize that many of the lessons that shaped my life came not from long conversations or formal advice, but simply from watching her live. She taught me that every person deserves respect. She taught me that compassion costs nothing but can mean everything. Most importantly, she taught me that a person's value is never determined by their circumstances.

Those lessons would stay with me long after she was gone.

There are many stories I could tell about my mother. Stories of challenges she faced, joys she experienced, and people whose lives she touched. Some stories are heartbreaking. Others are filled with laughter. Together, they form the picture of a woman who was so much more than the limitations others sometimes placed on her.

This book is not about a wheelchair.

MORE THAN A WHEELCHAIR

It is about the woman who sat in it.

It is about a daughter who became a beloved sister. A sister who became a cherished aunt. A woman who dreamed of becoming a mother despite overwhelming odds. A mother whose love would shape the life of her son.

It is about courage.

It is about family.

It is about resilience.

Most of all, it is about love.

The Corina Mae Foundation exists because of that love. Every act of service, every effort to support individuals with disabilities, every step taken in pursuit of dignity and inclusion traces its roots back to one woman who believed people should be valued for who they are.

Before there was a foundation, there was Corina.

Before there was a mission, there was a mother.

And before her story became a legacy, it was simply a life lived with grace, courage, and an unwavering commitment to the people she loved.

This is her story.

A Child Named Corina

Before she would become a mother, a sister, an aunt, and the inspiration behind a foundation, she was simply a little girl named Corina.

Corina Mae Thompson was born on February 21, 1970, in Phoenix, Arizona. Like many children, she entered the world surrounded by hopes, dreams, and a family eager to watch her grow. No one could have known then how many lives she would one day touch, or how her story would continue long after her own life ended.

Growing up, Corina faced challenges that many children never have to consider. Yet even at a young age, she displayed a quiet resilience that would remain with her throughout her life. The bumpy roads and rough patches she navigated might have made her path difficult, but they never limited who she was.

Those who knew Corina often remembered her kindness first.

She had a gentle nature that drew people to her. She listened carefully, cared deeply, and possessed the rare ability to make people feel accepted. Long before she became the center of a large family network, she was already learning the values that would define her life: compassion, patience, and understanding.

Family played an important role in shaping those values.

As she grew, Corina shared her life with her siblings, forming bonds that would become some of the most meaningful relationships she would ever have. Through celebrations and hardships, they remained connected by love, shared experiences, and the memories created together.

Like all families, theirs experienced moments of joy and moments of struggle. Through it all, Corina's love for her family never wavered.

The lessons she learned during those early years would become the foundation upon which she built the rest of her life.

She learned that strength was not always loud.

Sometimes strength meant enduring difficult circumstances when no one else could fully understand what you were facing.

Sometimes strength meant showing kindness when life had been unkind to you.

Sometimes strength meant choosing hope when giving up might seem easier.

These lessons would prepare her for challenges she could not yet imagine.

As a child, Corina could not have known that she would one day become a source of inspiration to so many people. She could not have known that a foundation would eventually bear her name and continue a mission inspired by her life.

She was simply living one day at a time, growing into the woman she would become.

What stands out most when looking back at Corina's early years is not the obstacles she faced. It is the character she developed despite them.

Many people spend their lives trying to learn empathy.

For Corina, empathy seemed to come naturally.

Many people learn resilience through hardship.

For Corina, resilience became part of who she was.

A CHILD NAMED CORINA

The world would eventually see a woman of remarkable courage. But before that courage could inspire others, it had to be formed and strengthened during the ordinary moments of childhood, among family members who loved her and experiences that shaped her understanding of the world.

Those early years may not have seemed extraordinary at the time.

Yet they laid the groundwork for everything that followed.

They helped shape a woman who would refuse to let adversity define her.

A woman whose greatest strength was not what she overcame, but how she treated others while overcoming it.

A woman named Corina Mae Thompson.

And her story was only beginning.

Learning Strength

Strength is often misunderstood.

Many people think strength looks like muscles, loud confidence, or the ability to overcome any obstacle without fear. But real strength is usually much quieter. It is found in the moments when life is difficult and a person chooses to keep moving forward anyway.

My mother understood that kind of strength.

Living with a disability meant facing challenges that many people never have to think about. Everyday tasks could require extra effort, extra planning, or extra patience. Things that others took for granted were sometimes obstacles that had to be navigated carefully. Yet despite these difficulties, she rarely focused on what she could not do.

Instead, she focused on what she could.

That perspective would become one of the defining characteristics of her life.

There were undoubtedly moments of frustration. Nobody experiences challenges without occasionally feeling discouraged. My mother was human, and like everyone else, she faced difficult days. Yet what made her remarkable was her refusal to allow those difficult days to define her future.

She understood something that many people never learn.

Life is not always fair.

The measure of a person is not found in the obstacles they face but in how they respond to them.

For Corina, responding meant adapting.

It meant finding new ways to accomplish goals.

It meant accepting help when necessary while maintaining her dignity and independence.

It meant recognizing limitations without surrendering to them.

Most importantly, it meant continuing to dream.

Too often, society sees disability before it sees the person. Assumptions are made. Expectations are lowered. Abilities are questioned.

My mother lived through those realities.

Yet she never allowed other people's assumptions to determine her worth.

She knew who she was.

She knew that her value was not measured by physical ability. It was measured by her character, her compassion, and the way she treated others.

Those who spent time with her quickly discovered that there was far more to Corina than the wheelchair she used.

They discovered her sense of humor.

They discovered her kindness.

They discovered her compassion for others who were struggling.

They discovered a woman who genuinely cared about people.

Perhaps that is why so many family members and friends felt comfortable around her. She created an environment where people felt accepted. She listened without judgment. She understood pain, disappointment, and hardship, which gave her a unique ability to relate to others who were carrying burdens of their own.

Sometimes the strongest people are those who know what it means

to struggle.

As the years passed, the challenges she faced helped shape the person she became. Rather than making her bitter, they made her compassionate. Rather than making her withdraw from the world, they encouraged her to connect more deeply with others.

That was one of her greatest gifts.

She had the ability to transform personal hardship into empathy.

The experiences that could have hardened her heart instead softened it.

The obstacles that could have defeated her instead strengthened her resolve.

The limitations others saw became opportunities to demonstrate perseverance.

Without realizing it, she was teaching everyone around her.

She was teaching that disability does not diminish humanity.

She was teaching that worth is not defined by ability.

She was teaching that courage is not the absence of challenges but the willingness to face them.

Years later, those lessons would help shape the mission of The Corina Mae Foundation.

The foundation was never created simply because my mother had a disability.

It was created because of the way she lived with it.

She demonstrated dignity.

She demonstrated resilience.

She demonstrated grace.

Most of all, she demonstrated that every person deserves to be seen for who they are rather than judged by what others notice first.

Long before there was a foundation bearing her name, she was already changing lives through the example she set.

People may have noticed the wheelchair.

LEARNING STRENGTH

But those who truly knew Corina saw something much greater.

They saw a woman whose strength could not be measured by physical ability.

A woman whose determination could not be limited by circumstance.

A woman who was becoming exactly who she was meant to be.

And the greatest chapters of her story were still ahead.

The Mother I Knew

The world knew my mother as Corina Mae Thompson.

I knew her as Mom.

Before there was a foundation, before there was a mission, before I ever imagined becoming an advocate, there was simply a mother and son learning how to navigate life together.

Some of my earliest memories are tied to her wheelchair.

As a child, I did not see it the way other people did. It was simply part of our everyday life. It was part of who my mother was, just as my own disabilities would later become part of who I was.

What I remember most is not the wheelchair itself.

I remember her laughter.

I remember sitting beside her and talking about life.

I remember watching her face challenges that would have overwhelmed many people and somehow finding a way to keep moving forward.

When you're a child, you don't always realize you're witnessing strength. You assume everyone's family functions the way yours does. It isn't until years later that you begin to understand what your parent was carrying and how much they sacrificed along the way.

THE MOTHER I KNEW

My mother carried more than most people ever knew.

There was physical pain.

There were medical challenges.

There were barriers that existed simply because the world was not designed with people like her in mind.

Yet somehow she still found room to care for others.

She still worried about family.

She still checked on the people she loved.

She still made sure I knew I was loved.

Looking back now, I don't know how she managed to carry so much while giving so much.

But she did.

As I grew older, our connection deepened in ways that are difficult to explain.

Part of it came from our shared experiences with disability.

Part of it came from understanding what it felt like to be looked at differently.

We didn't always have to explain things to one another.

Sometimes we just knew.

When she was hurting, I could see it.

When I was struggling, she could see it too.

There was an unspoken understanding between us that only grew stronger with time.

The world often sees disability through statistics, diagnoses, or limitations.

That was never how I saw it.

I saw my mother adapting.

I saw her persevering.

I saw her refusing to let difficult circumstances define who she was.

And because I watched her do those things, I learned to do them too.

Without realizing it, she was teaching me lessons that would shape

my entire life.

She taught me that dignity belongs to everyone.

She taught me that compassion is stronger than judgment.

She taught me that true strength often goes unnoticed because it is quiet.

Most importantly, she taught me that a person's worth has nothing to do with what others assume they can or cannot do.

These lessons followed me into adulthood.

They influenced how I viewed the world.

They influenced how I treated people.

Eventually, they influenced why I became an advocate.

For years, though, she was simply my mother.

Not an inspiration.

Not a symbol.

Not the namesake of a foundation.

Just Mom.

And honestly, I think that is how she would have wanted it.

To the public, she may someday be remembered through this book or through the work of The Corina Mae Foundation.

But before she was any of those things, she was the woman who sat beside me during difficult moments.

The woman who encouraged me when I felt defeated.

The woman who taught me resilience without ever calling it a lesson.

The woman whose strength became part of my own.

At the time, neither of us knew what the future would hold.

Neither of us knew that her story would eventually inspire advocacy efforts across Alabama.

Neither of us knew that her name would one day become the banner under which others would find support, understanding, and hope.

We were simply a mother and son.

Living life.

THE MOTHER I KNEW

Facing challenges together.

And building a bond that even death would never break.

The Day Everything Changed

Some dates become part of you.

No matter how much time passes, you remember where you were, what you were doing, and the exact moment your life changed forever.

For me, that day was December 23, 2020.

I was supposed to leave for a sleep study that evening. Looking back, I cannot explain it, but something kept telling me I needed to stay home with my mother.

So I did.

We spent the evening together. We cooked dinner, sat down and ate, and talked like we had so many times before.

Nothing about that day felt unusual.

Nothing felt like goodbye.

After dinner, my mother began getting ready for bed. She slept in a lift recliner, and as she often did, she started transferring from her wheelchair into the chair.

She never made it.

Before she could reach the recliner, she began having a stroke.

Everything happened so fast.

I immediately called 911.

THE DAY EVERYTHING CHANGED

As we waited for help to arrive, I held her hand.

She kept looking around the room, confused by what she was seeing.

Then she looked at me and asked a question I will never forget.

"Noah, it's so beautiful. Where am I?"

She didn't know where she was.

But she knew I was there.

For years, those words have stayed with me.

I cannot fully explain why, but when I think back on that moment, it is one of the reasons I believe in Heaven. My mother seemed to be seeing something that the rest of us could not.

Something beautiful.

Something beyond the room we were sitting in.

Then she said something else.

"Noah, I am going to die."

I immediately told her she wasn't.

I tried to reassure her.

I tried to convince both of us that everything was going to be okay.

But deep down, she seemed to know something I did not.

The ambulance arrived and rushed her to the hospital.

At first, there was hope.

There is always hope.

But as time passed, that hope slowly gave way to reality.

Eventually, a doctor pulled my father and me into a family room.

He explained that they had been performing CPR since my mother arrived.

Then they took us back to see her.

Even then, they were still trying.

Medical staff surrounded her bed.

Machines filled the room with sounds I will never forget.

CPR was still ongoing.

My parents had spent their lives together, but they had never been

legally married. Because of that, the responsibility of making medical decisions fell to me.

I was not prepared for that responsibility.

No child ever is.

I knelt beside her bed.

I held her hand.

I cried.

And I looked at my mother lying there while doctors and nurses fought to bring her back.

It remains one of the hardest moments of my life.

I had never seen anyone in that condition before.

As painful as it was, I knew.

I knew my mother was gone.

The woman who had raised me, protected me, and loved me was no longer suffering in that hospital bed.

What remained was only her earthly body.

After an hour of CPR, I made the decision no son should ever have to make.

I told them to stop.

Even writing those words today is difficult.

Some decisions stay with you forever.

This is one of them.

Later, doctors told us that nothing could have been done to save her.

No treatment.

No surgery.

No intervention.

The outcome would have been the same.

Knowing that brought some comfort, but it did not lessen the grief.

Soon after, another phone call had to be made.

This time, I was the one making it.

I had to call my grandmother and tell her that her daughter had died.

THE DAY EVERYTHING CHANGED

I had to call family members and share news that no one ever wants to hear.

Later that night, my father and I drove to my aunt's house because it was after one in the morning and she was not answering her phone.

I can still remember the sounds of grief that filled that night.

The cries of a mother who had lost her daughter.

The cries of sisters who had lost their sister.

The silence that followed when there were no words left to say.

None of us slept.

There was no time.

Only six hours after my mother's passing, we were sitting in a funeral home discussing arrangements.

The world had changed, yet life was already demanding decisions.

Looking back now, those hours remain some of the most difficult of my life.

The kind of moments you would never wish upon anyone.

Moments that change who you are forever.

Moments that divide your life into before and after.

And for me, that was the day everything changed.

Turning Grief Into Purpose

After losing my mother, I wasn't thinking about starting a foundation.

I wasn't thinking about advocacy, outreach, or building something in her name.

I was thinking about how much I missed her.

Grief has a way of changing your perspective. It forces you to slow down and look at life differently. It causes you to revisit memories you haven't thought about in years. It makes you reflect on the people who shaped you and the lessons they left behind.

For a long time, that was where I stayed.

I remembered our conversations.

I remembered her laughter.

I remembered the way she faced challenges with a courage that often went unnoticed by the people around her.

Most of all, I remembered her strength.

As the months turned into years, I began noticing something.

The struggles my mother and I had faced were not unique.

All across Alabama, there were disabled individuals and families living through many of the same challenges.

There were accessibility barriers.

There were misunderstandings about disability.

There were individuals who felt invisible, unheard, or forgotten.

I recognized those experiences because I had lived them.

My mother had lived them too.

The more I thought about it, the more I realized that her story carried lessons that extended beyond our family. Her life represented something larger. It reflected the experiences of countless people who fight battles every day that others never see.

For years, I carried those thoughts quietly.

Part of me wanted to tell her story.

Part of me was afraid.

Not because I doubted what she had meant to me, but because telling her story meant reopening wounds that had never fully healed.

Grief was familiar.

Purpose was not.

Yet the more I reflected on her life, the more I felt a responsibility growing within me.

My mother had spent her life showing strength in the face of adversity.

She had demonstrated dignity when the world sometimes failed to offer it.

She had shown me how to keep moving forward when life became difficult.

What if those lessons could help someone else?

What if her story could inspire understanding?

What if the challenges we faced could become part of a solution for others?

Those questions stayed with me.

Eventually, they became impossible to ignore.

I realized that honoring my mother could involve more than remembering her privately.

It could involve continuing her impact publicly.

Not because she had sought recognition.

Quite the opposite.

My mother never lived her life expecting attention or praise.

She simply cared about people.

She believed in treating others with kindness and respect.

She believed every person deserved dignity.

Those values had shaped my life. Now they could help shape something larger.

Little by little, the idea of a foundation began taking form.

At first, it was simply a thought.

Then it became a vision.

Then it became a promise.

A promise that my mother's story would not end with her passing.

A promise that disabled individuals would know they are valued.

A promise that families facing challenges would not feel alone.

A promise that compassion could be transformed into action.

The more I worked toward that vision, the more I understood something important.

The foundation was never about loss.

It was about legacy.

Loss was where the journey began.

Legacy was where it was headed.

Every organization needs a name. For me, there was never really another choice.

The Corina Mae Foundation.

Not because my mother wanted recognition.

Not because I wanted to create a monument.

But because her life embodied the values I hoped the organization would represent.

Strength.

Compassion.

Resilience.

Dignity.

Hope.

The foundation carries her name because those values continue to carry her spirit.

Today, when people see the name Corina Mae Foundation, I hope they see more than an organization.

I hope they see the story of a woman who never allowed disability to define her.

I hope they see the story of a mother whose love continues to shape the life of her son.

And I hope they see proof that even after loss, something meaningful can still grow.

My mother's life taught me many lessons.

One of the most important was this:

Our greatest challenges do not always have the final word.

Sometimes, from our deepest pain, purpose is born.

The Corina Mae Foundation is that purpose.

And it began with her.

A Mission Bigger Than One Story

When people hear the name “The Corina Mae Foundation,” they often assume it exists simply to honor my mother.

While that is true, it is only part of the story.

The foundation was never meant to be a memorial alone.

It was meant to become a mission.

As I reflected on my mother’s life and my own experiences growing up disabled, I began noticing a common thread. So many of the challenges we faced were not caused by our disabilities themselves.

They were caused by misunderstanding.

They were caused by barriers.

They were caused by a lack of awareness and support.

Over time, I realized that disability is not simply a personal experience. It is also a community issue. When resources are difficult to find, when services are inaccessible, when people feel isolated or forgotten, entire families are affected.

I knew firsthand what that felt like.

I also knew there were thousands of others across Alabama carrying similar burdens.

Some were disabled individuals searching for answers.

A MISSION BIGGER THAN ONE STORY

Some were parents trying to help their children.

Some were caregivers doing everything they could for the people they loved.

Some were simply looking for someone who understood.

That realization became the foundation's purpose.

The Corina Mae Foundation exists because everyone deserves to be seen, heard, and valued.

It exists because disability should never determine a person's worth.

It exists because no one should have to navigate life's challenges alone.

At its heart, our mission is simple.

We believe every person deserves dignity.

We believe every person deserves respect.

We believe every person deserves opportunities to thrive.

Those beliefs may sound straightforward, but they are often easier said than done.

Too many people are still overlooked.

Too many people are still misunderstood.

Too many people feel invisible.

My mother knew what it felt like to live in a world that sometimes focused on limitations instead of possibilities.

I know what that feels like too.

That shared experience is woven into everything this foundation does.

Our goal is not to speak for disabled individuals.

Our goal is to help ensure their voices are heard.

Our goal is not to define people's needs.

Our goal is to help connect them with resources, support, and opportunities that allow them to define their own paths.

Advocacy begins with listening.

Compassion begins with understanding.

Meaningful change begins when people stop asking, "What's wrong

with you?” and start asking, “How can I support you?”

That shift in perspective can change lives.

For me, the foundation represents hope.

Not the kind of hope that ignores reality.

The kind that faces reality honestly and still chooses to believe things can improve.

Hope that barriers can be removed.

Hope that communities can become more inclusive.

Hope that individuals and families can find the support they need.

Hope that future generations will grow up in a world that sees disability with understanding rather than judgment.

Every project we undertake traces back to that vision.

Every resource shared.

Every partnership built.

Every conversation started.

Every act of service.

Each one is rooted in a simple belief that my mother demonstrated throughout her life: every person matters.

That belief continues to guide us as we grow.

The foundation may carry my mother’s name, but its mission extends far beyond our family’s story.

It belongs to every individual who has ever felt unseen.

It belongs to every caregiver who has ever felt overwhelmed.

It belongs to every family searching for support.

It belongs to every person determined to build a more compassionate world.

Sometimes people ask what success will look like for The Corina Mae Foundation.

For me, success is not measured by the size of an organization.

It is measured by impact.

It is measured by lives touched.

A MISSION BIGGER THAN ONE STORY

It is measured by barriers removed.

It is measured by voices uplifted.

It is measured by the moments when someone who once felt alone realizes they are not.

That is the future I hope to help build.

A future where understanding replaces judgment.

A future where compassion replaces indifference.

A future where disability is recognized as a part of someone's experience, not the entirety of who they are.

The Corina Mae Foundation exists because of one woman's strength.

But its mission is for countless others.

And that mission is only beginning.

Building Something That Matters

Every meaningful journey begins with a first step.

For The Corina Mae Foundation, that first step was not a major event, a large donation, or a grand announcement.

It was a decision.

A decision that my mother's story deserved to become something more than a memory.

A decision that the challenges we faced could be transformed into opportunities for others.

A decision to try.

When I first began building the foundation, I knew the mission was important.

What I didn't know was how much work it would take to turn that mission into reality.

Ideas are powerful.

But creating change requires action.

There were websites to build.

Documents to create.

Policies to develop.

Programs to imagine.

Community relationships to establish.

There were long nights spent planning and researching, trying to determine how best to serve disabled individuals and families across Alabama.

At times, the task felt overwhelming.

After all, I wasn't building this organization because I had years of nonprofit experience.

I was building it because I had lived experience.

I knew what it felt like to struggle.

I knew what it felt like to search for support.

I knew what it felt like to watch someone you love face barriers they should never have had to face.

And I knew I wanted to help change that.

What kept me moving forward was the reason behind the work.

Whenever challenges appeared, I thought about my mother.

I thought about her resilience.

I thought about the determination she showed throughout her life.

I thought about the countless times she navigated obstacles without giving up.

If she could face everything she endured and continue moving forward, then surely I could keep building.

The more the vision developed, the more I realized this foundation was never meant to belong to one person.

It was meant to belong to a community.

A community of disabled individuals.

A community of caregivers.

A community of families.

A community of advocates.

A community of people who believe that everyone deserves dignity, respect, and an opportunity to thrive.

That realization shaped the foundation's direction.

MORE THAN A WHEELCHAIR

Our purpose was not simply to provide resources.

Our purpose was to build connections.

We wanted people to know they were not alone.

We wanted them to know that someone understood.

We wanted to create pathways toward support, understanding, and empowerment.

Because sometimes the most important thing you can give someone is hope.

As the foundation continued taking shape, another realization became clear.

Advocacy is not always about changing laws or policies.

Sometimes advocacy begins with changing hearts.

It begins with helping people understand what disability truly looks like.

It begins with challenging assumptions.

It begins with encouraging compassion.

Much of my life had been spent witnessing misconceptions about disability.

People often focused on what disabled individuals could not do rather than recognizing everything they could.

My mother experienced this.

I experienced it.

Countless others experience it every day.

The foundation became an opportunity to help rewrite that narrative.

Not through anger.

Not through division.

But through education, understanding, and community.

Every page created.

Every resource shared.

Every volunteer recruited.

Every conversation started.

BUILDING SOMETHING THAT MATTERS

Each one represented another step toward that goal.

There are still many miles ahead.

The work is far from finished.

In many ways, it is only beginning.

Yet every time I look at what has been built so far, I am reminded of something important.

The foundation exists because of love.

Not the kind of love that exists only in memories.

The kind that inspires action.

The kind that survives loss.

The kind that motivates people to keep going when the road ahead seems uncertain.

My mother's life planted the seed.

Her strength nourished the vision.

Her legacy continues to guide the mission.

Today, when people visit our website, attend an event, volunteer, or benefit from a resource, they may see an organization.

I see something more.

I see a promise being kept.

A promise to remember.

A promise to advocate.

A promise to serve.

Most importantly, a promise that Corina Mae's strength would continue helping others long after she was gone.

That promise is the foundation.

And every day, we continue building upon it.

Her Legacy Lives On

When people hear the word *legacy*, they often think of something left behind after a person is gone.

A legacy can be many things.

It can be a building.

A business.

A collection of accomplishments.

A family name.

But those are not the things that come to mind when I think about my mother.

When I think about her legacy, I think about the lives she touched.

I think about the lessons she taught without ever standing in front of a classroom.

I think about the strength she demonstrated without ever seeking recognition.

I think about the love she gave so freely to those around her.

That is her legacy.

And no amount of time can take it away.

Years have passed since my mother's passing, yet there are still moments when I find myself reflecting on something she taught me.

HER LEGACY LIVES ON

Sometimes it is a memory.

Sometimes it is a conversation.

Sometimes it is simply the way she handled a challenging situation.

Those moments continue to shape the decisions I make and the person I strive to be.

In that way, her life is still having an impact.

Not only on me, but on everyone touched by the work of The Corina Mae Foundation.

Every resource we share carries a piece of her story.

Every act of advocacy reflects a value she lived by.

Every effort to support disabled individuals is rooted in lessons that began long before the foundation existed.

People often ask how I stay motivated.

The answer is simple.

I remember where this started.

I remember the woman who spent her life demonstrating courage through circumstances she never chose.

I remember the mother who taught me that dignity belongs to every person.

I remember the countless times she showed compassion when she had every reason to be discouraged.

Those memories remind me why this work matters.

They remind me why quitting is not an option.

The foundation was created in her memory, but it is ultimately about something much larger than memory.

It is about the future.

It is about creating communities where disabled individuals feel welcomed and included.

It is about helping families find support when they need it most.

It is about encouraging understanding in place of judgment.

It is about making sure people know they are not alone.

These goals are not accomplished overnight.

Real change rarely happens that way.

It happens one conversation at a time.

One connection at a time.

One act of kindness at a time.

My mother understood that.

She understood that small actions often have lasting impacts.

A listening ear.

An encouraging word.

A moment of compassion.

These things may seem small, but they can change someone's life.

The same principle guides the foundation today.

We may never fully know every life that is touched by this work.

We may never hear every story.

But if someone feels less alone because of something we have done,
then the mission is working.

If someone discovers a resource that improves their quality of life,
the mission is working.

If someone begins viewing disability with greater understanding and
respect, the mission is working.

That is how legacy continues.

Not through monuments.

Through people.

My mother's story began in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1970.

It continued through decades of challenges, triumphs, relationships,
and experiences that shaped who she became.

Today, her story continues in a way neither of us could have imagined.

It continues through advocacy.

It continues through service.

It continues through every individual who finds hope in the message
that disability does not diminish a person's value, potential, or worth.

HER LEGACY LIVES ON

Most importantly, it continues through love.
The same love that carried her through hardship.
The same love she poured into her family.
The same love that continues to inspire me every day.
When I think about my mother's life, I no longer focus only on the day she passed away.
I focus on the countless days she lived.
The lives she touched.
The lessons she left behind.
The strength she shared.
The hope she inspired.
Because that is the true measure of a life.
Not how it ends.
But how it continues through others.
My mother's name is Corina Mae Thompson.
She was a daughter.
A sister.
An aunt.
A mother.
A woman of resilience, dignity, and compassion.
She was more than a wheelchair.
She was more than the challenges she faced.
She was more than the obstacles life placed in her path.
She was the reason this story was written.
She was the inspiration behind this foundation.
And she remains the heart of everything we do.
Her story is not over.
Her legacy lives on.

To the One Who Needed This Story

If you are reading this chapter, then you have reached the end of my mother's story.

Or perhaps more accurately, you have reached the end of my telling of it.

The truth is that stories like hers never really end.

They continue in the lives they touched.

They continue in the lessons they taught.

They continue in the people who choose to carry them forward.

My mother's life changed mine in ways I am still discovering.

Every challenge she faced taught me something about perseverance.

Every act of kindness taught me something about compassion.

Every obstacle she overcame taught me something about courage.

Even after her passing, she continues to shape the way I see the world.

That is the remarkable thing about love.

Death may end a life, but it cannot erase the impact that life has on others.

As I sit here writing these final words, I find myself thinking about the people who might pick up this book.

Perhaps you purchased it because you wanted to learn about The

Corina Mae Foundation.

Perhaps you are a parent.

Perhaps you are a caregiver.

Perhaps you live with a disability yourself.

Perhaps you are carrying grief that feels heavier than you can bear.

Or perhaps you simply stumbled across this story and decided to see where it would lead.

Whatever brought you here, I want you to know that this book was written for you as much as it was written for my mother.

Because at its heart, this book is not just about Corina Mae Thompson.

It is about resilience.

It is about hope.

It is about finding strength when life asks more of us than we think we can give.

If there is one thing I hope you take away from these pages, it is this:

Your circumstances do not define your worth.

My mother spent much of her life in a wheelchair.

The world saw her disability.

Those who truly knew her saw her kindness.

They saw her humor.

They saw her love.

They saw her strength.

The wheelchair was only part of her story.

It was never the whole story.

The same is true for each of us.

We are more than our diagnoses.

More than our losses.

More than our mistakes.

More than the labels placed upon us by others.

Every person carries a story that deserves to be heard.

Every person carries value that deserves to be recognized.

MORE THAN A WHEELCHAIR

Every person carries a light that deserves the chance to shine.

I learned that from my mother.

I hope you can learn it from her as well.

And if you are someone who is struggling right now, I want to speak to you directly.

Keep going.

I know those words are simple.

I know there may be days when they feel impossible.

But keep going.

There were countless times when my mother could have surrendered to despair.

There were countless moments when giving up would have been understandable.

Yet she chose to keep moving forward.

Sometimes one day at a time.

Sometimes one moment at a time.

That choice became her legacy.

You do not have to have all the answers today.

You do not have to know what tomorrow looks like.

You only have to take the next step.

And then the one after that.

The Corina Mae Foundation began with a mother's strength.

It grew through grief.

It continues because of hope.

My hope is that this story reminds you that even in life's most difficult moments, purpose can still be found.

Healing can still happen.

And something beautiful can still grow.

Thank you for walking through these memories with me.

Thank you for taking the time to know my mother.

Thank you for helping keep her story alive.

TO THE ONE WHO NEEDED THIS STORY

Most of all, thank you for believing that every person deserves dignity, respect, and a chance to be seen for who they truly are.

My mother's name was Corina Mae Thompson.

She was my hero.

She was my mom.

She was the inspiration behind The Corina Mae Foundation.

And she was, and always will be, so much more than a wheelchair.

With gratitude,

Noah Roberts

Founder, The Corina Mae Foundation

"Her strength built me. Her story inspired this foundation. Her legacy lives on through every life we touch."

Conclusion

When I first began writing this book, I thought I was telling my mother's story.

By the time I reached these final pages, I realized I was telling much more than that.

I was telling the story of strength.

I was telling the story of resilience.

I was telling the story of love that continues long after loss.

My mother's life was not easy. She faced hardships that many people will never fully understand. She experienced physical pain, barriers, uncertainty, and moments that tested her in ways most people never saw.

Yet when I think about her life, those are not the things I remember first.

I remember her laughter.

I remember her kindness.

I remember her determination.

I remember the way she made people feel valued and loved.

Those are the things that truly defined her.

Too often, society looks at disability and sees limitation.

CONCLUSION

My mother taught me to see something different.

She taught me to see courage.

She taught me to see perseverance.

She taught me to see the strength required to continue moving forward when the path ahead is difficult.

Most importantly, she taught me that every person deserves dignity, regardless of ability, circumstance, or the challenges they face.

That lesson became part of who I am.

It shaped the way I view others.

It shaped the way I approach advocacy.

It shaped the foundation that now carries her name.

The Corina Mae Foundation was born from loss, but it is sustained by hope.

It exists because one woman's life demonstrated the importance of compassion.

It exists because her story deserves to be remembered.

It exists because there are still individuals and families who need to know they are not alone.

Every resource we provide, every partnership we build, and every person we serve is part of a promise.

A promise that my mother's life will continue making a difference.

A promise that disabled individuals will be seen, heard, and respected.

A promise that future generations will inherit a more understanding and compassionate world.

As I think about my mother today, I no longer focus solely on what she endured.

Instead, I focus on what she gave.

She gave love.

She gave encouragement.

She gave wisdom.

She gave strength.

Those gifts continue to ripple outward through every life touched by this foundation.

If there is one message I hope remains with you after reading this book, it is simple:

Look beyond what you see at first glance.

Look beyond the wheelchair.

Look beyond the diagnosis.

Look beyond the assumptions.

Take the time to know the person.

Because every individual carries a story.

Every person has dreams, fears, struggles, and victories that deserve recognition.

Every person has value.

My mother's story reminds us of that truth.

She was a daughter.

A sister.

An aunt.

A mother.

A friend.

An advocate in ways she may never have realized.

She was a woman of courage, dignity, and unwavering love.

She was the inspiration behind this foundation.

And she was so much more than a wheelchair.

Though her journey on earth ended on December 23, 2020, her influence did not.

It lives on in the family she loved.

It lives on in the lessons she left behind.

It lives on in the mission of The Corina Mae Foundation.

And it lives on in every person who chooses compassion over judgment, understanding over assumption, and hope over despair.

This book began with a woman named Corina Mae Thompson.

CONCLUSION

It ends with her legacy.

A legacy of strength.

A legacy of courage.

A legacy of love.

And for as long as her story is remembered, that legacy will continue to grow.

In Loving Memory of

Corina Mae Thompson (Soares)

February 21, 1970 - December 23, 2020

"Her strength built me. Her love guided me. Her legacy lives on through every life we touch."

Epilogue

There is a saying that grief is simply love with nowhere to go.

For a long time, I believed that.

After my mother passed away on December 23, 2020, I carried grief in ways I did not always understand. Some days it felt heavy. Some days it felt quiet. Some days it arrived unexpectedly through a memory, a photograph, a song, or a simple thought.

But as the years passed, I realized something.

Love always finds somewhere to go.

Sometimes it finds its way into memories.

Sometimes it finds its way into stories.

Sometimes it finds its way into service.

And sometimes it grows into a mission.

That is what happened here.

When my mother was alive, I never imagined I would one day write a book about her. I never imagined I would create a foundation in her name. I never imagined that the lessons she taught me through ordinary moments would eventually become the guiding principles for helping others.

Yet here we are.

What began as the story of one woman has become part of something much larger.

Every time a family finds support through The Corina Mae Foundation, her legacy continues.

Every time someone feels seen, heard, and valued, her legacy contin-

EPILOGUE

ues.

Every time a person chooses compassion over judgment, her legacy continues.

The foundation carries her name, but its purpose belongs to everyone who believes that dignity should never be dependent on ability.

I often wonder what my mother would think if she could see all of this.

I think she would probably be surprised that anyone was writing a book about her.

She would probably laugh and say there were far more interesting people in the world.

That was who she was.

She never sought attention.

She never sought recognition.

She simply loved people.

And in the end, that may be the most remarkable legacy a person can leave behind.

Not fame.

Not wealth.

Not status.

Just love.

Real love.

The kind that remains long after someone is gone.

As I close this book, I do so with gratitude.

Gratitude for the years I had with my mother.

Gratitude for the lessons she taught me.

Gratitude for the opportunities to carry her story forward.

Most importantly, gratitude for every person who took the time to read these pages.

You now know a piece of her story.

You know about her strength.

You know about her resilience.

You know about the love she carried throughout her life.

My hope is that you will carry a small part of that with you.

If this book encourages you to see people differently, then her story has made a difference.

If it inspires you to show kindness when it is difficult, then her story has made a difference.

If it reminds you to cherish the people you love while you still can, then her story has made a difference.

And if it gives hope to even one person facing challenges of their own, then every page was worth writing.

My mother's journey may have ended, but her influence has not.

It lives on in those who loved her.

It lives on in this foundation.

It lives on in every life touched by compassion, understanding, and advocacy.

I believe she is at peace now.

I imagine her reunited with those she loved, free from pain and surrounded by grace. I imagine her watching over the family she cherished so deeply. And I hope she knows that the love she poured into this world is still growing.

Because that is the thing about gardens.

When they are planted with care, they continue to bloom long after the gardener is gone.

My mother planted seeds of strength, kindness, faith, and love throughout her life.

This book is one bloom.

The Corina Mae Foundation is another.

And I pray there will be many more.

Until we meet again, Mom.

Thank you for everything.

EPILOGUE

With all my love,

Noah

“Some people leave behind memories. Others leave behind a legacy. My mother left behind both.”

Afterword

Mom, if somehow these words reach you, I hope you know that you are remembered.

You are loved.

You are missed.

And your legacy is still changing lives.

Thank you for giving me the strength to keep going.

Thank you for teaching me what truly matters.

Most of all, thank you for being my mother.

I love you, Mom.

And I always will.

“Her strength shaped my life. Her story inspired a mission. Her legacy continues through every person we serve.”