

AN ANIMATED STORY SERIES

The Last Branch

Episode 1: The Family Tree

Inspired by my life: a story of love, loss and the family that keeps on growing



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NO ONE GRIEVES ALONE

The Last Branch

Episode 1: The Family Tree

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Adelanto, California · lastbranch.org

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*Inspired by my life.
Some names and details have been changed for privacy,
and some conversations have been recreated from memory.*



*For Mom, Dad and my three brothers,
whose love still blooms.*

And for my two sons, my continuing branches.

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A Letter from Claudia

“When I lost my dad, I lost the last living member of my immediate family. Now it’s me and my two children. I created The Last Branch Foundation to honor the family I lost and help others feel less alone in their grief.”

This book is the first chapter of my story. It is about my mom and dad, my three brothers, and my two boys. It is about what happens to love when the people we love are gone.

This story is inspired by my life. Some names and details have been changed to protect my family’s privacy. The conversations are written from my memories, using the words I remember wherever I could.

If you are grieving, I hope these pages help you remember your own family tree, and know that you are not alone.

Claudia Carr

Founder, The Last Branch Foundation

THE PEOPLE IN THIS STORY

Meet My Family

In this story, every person in my family is a branch on our tree. When someone passes, their branch does not fall. It blooms with glowing blossoms, each in its own color, because their love stays.



Mom

Our roots, and the warmth of our home. Her branch blooms soft pink.



Dad

The steady trunk that held us all up. His branch blooms gold.



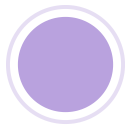
Ray

My protector brother. His branch blooms pale blue.



Terrence

My brother who made everyone laugh. His branch blooms orange.



Kevin

My dreamer brother who loved the stars. His branch blooms lavender.



Me, Claudia

The only girl, holding on to all of them. Now the last branch.



Jordan and Caleb

My two sons, the branches that keep growing with me.



Every family is a tree. Some trees are small and new. Some are tall and old, with roots that reach deep into the ground.

Mine was the kind of tree you could see from far away: strong and wide, with branches full of people I loved. This is the story of that tree, and of how its love never stopped growing.



At the center of it all were my mom and dad. They were our roots.

Mom was the warmth of our home. She could turn a few simple ingredients into a feast, and a hard day into a good one.

“Come taste this,” she would say, holding out the spoon. “Does it need anything?”

“More!” I always answered, and she always laughed.



Dad was the trunk that held us all up. He was steady, patient and strong.

When I was little, he would lift me onto his shoulders, his big hands wrapped around my ankles.

“Can you see the whole world up there?” he asked.

“Almost!”

“Then hold on,” he laughed. “I’ve got you.”



Together, Mom and Dad planted something bigger than a family.
They planted a love strong enough to last through every season.



From those roots grew four branches: my three brothers, and me.

Our house was never quiet. There was always someone laughing, someone arguing over the last biscuit, and someone running through the front door.



Ray was the protector. He walked us to school and made sure everyone got home.

One cold afternoon it started to rain, and I didn't have a jacket. Ray took off his and put it around my shoulders.

"Aren't you cold?" I asked.

"Nope," he said. He shivered the whole way home, and never once complained.



Terrence was the one who made us laugh. He could turn a bad day upside down with one silly face.

“Terrence, eat your food,” Mom would say, trying not to smile.

“I am eating,” he’d answer, with two spoons stuck over his eyes like glasses. Even Dad couldn’t keep a straight face.



Kevin was the dreamer. He loved to draw and to ask big questions about the stars.

On summer nights we lay in the grass, and he pointed up at the sky.

“One day I’m going to name a star after you,” he whispered.

“Which one?”

“The brightest one,” he said. “Obviously.”



And then there was me, the only girl, holding on to all of them.
In our family tree, my branch grew right in the middle, wrapped
up in theirs.



When I grew up, my branch began to grow branches of its own.
First came Jordan, and then Caleb.

Holding my sons for the first time, I understood my parents in a
brand new way. Love doesn't divide. It multiplies.



Our family tree was fuller than ever. Sunday dinners, birthdays and holidays brought every branch together around one table.

My boys grew up surrounded by grandparents and uncles who adored them.



But every tree lives through seasons. Over the years, the hardest season came.

My mom died. Then, one by one, my three brothers died too. When someone dies, their body stops working and they cannot come back. It hurt more than any words can say.



I thought their branches would break and fall away. But that is not what happened.

Each branch began to glow, and then it bloomed: soft pink blossoms for Mom, and bright blossoms for Ray, Terrence and Kevin.



That is what love does. It doesn't leave when someone is gone. It changes shape.

I still hear Mom humming when I cook. I still feel Ray watching out for me. I hear Terrence's laugh, and I see Kevin's stars every night.



Through all of it, Dad was still with me. He was the last living member of my immediate family.

We grew closer than ever. We sat together for hours, telling old stories and laughing about the days when our house was so loud.



Dad's steps had grown slower, but his hands were the same. They were the hands that held my ankles on his shoulders, fixed every broken thing in our house, and held each of my boys the day they were born.

"You know I'm proud of you," he said, squeezing my hand.

"I know, Dad."



In his last days, I sat beside him and held his hand the way he had always held mine.

For my whole life, his hands had been the steady ones. Now it was my turn to be steady for him.



Then my dad died.

He was the last living member of my immediate family. And just like that, I was the last branch left.



A few weeks later, I picked up my phone to call him, the way I did every evening. I had already pressed his name before I remembered.

His chair on the porch stayed empty. Nobody asked me if I had eaten. The house had never felt so quiet.



Grief came in waves. Some days I felt sad. Some days I felt angry. Some days I felt nothing at all. Some days a happy memory made me smile, and then made me cry.

I learned that every one of those feelings is part of grief, and every one of them is okay.



One evening, my boys found me sitting alone. They sat down on either side of me and wrapped their arms around me.

“You don’t have to be okay, Mom,” Caleb said quietly.

“We miss him too,” said Jordan. “But we’re still here.”

I was not the only branch. I had two strong branches growing right beside me.



When I looked up at our tree, Dad's branch had bloomed too,
glowing gold above us.

My whole family was there, in every blossom, shining down on
the three of us.



I began to think about everyone else who feels like the last branch: the widow eating dinner alone, the child who misses a grandparent, the teenager who doesn't know how to talk about it.



So I made a decision. My branch would keep growing, toward them.

I created The Last Branch Foundation to honor the family I lost, and to help others feel less alone in their grief.



Starting the Foundation gave my grief a purpose. It did not take my grief away.

Some days I still reach for the phone to call my dad. Some days I still cry when I smell Mom's cooking. But when I sit with someone who is hurting, I can tell them the truth: "I know. I'm still grieving too. And we don't have to do this alone."

ACTIVITY 1

Let's Talk About It

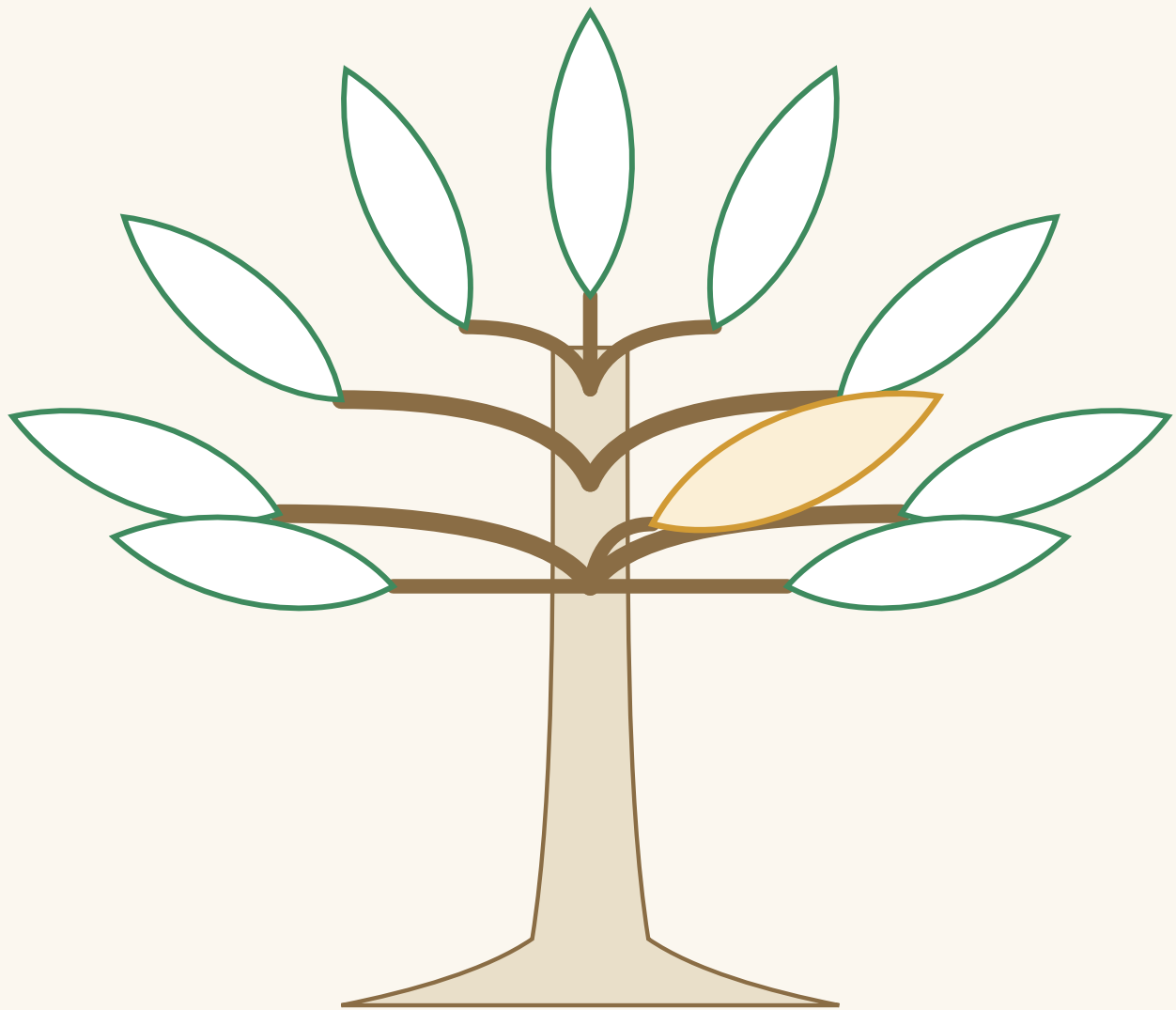
There are no wrong answers. Take turns, and share only what feels right.

1. Claudia's mom made the house feel safe. Who makes you feel safe?
2. Each of Claudia's brothers was special in his own way. What makes the people in your family special?
3. In the story, branches don't fall. They bloom. What do you think that means?
4. Claudia still hears her mom humming when she cooks. How do you remember someone you love?
5. Her sons told her, "We're still here." Who is still here for you?
6. Claudia's branch grew toward people who needed help. How could you help someone who is sad?

ACTIVITY 2

My Family Tree

Write a name on each leaf. Color the leaves green for people who are with you now. For someone you have lost, draw a blossom in their favorite color. The golden leaf is you!



ACTIVITY 3

How Are You Feeling Today?

Circle the faces that match how you feel. You can circle more than one. Every feeling is okay.



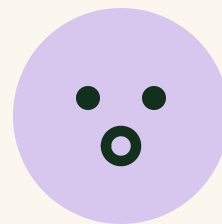
Happy



Sad



Angry



Worried



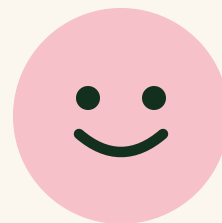
Numb



Lonely



Calm



Loved

Today I feel _____

because _____

Something that helps me feel better is _____

Someone I can talk to is _____

One thing I remember about someone I love is _____

Helping Someone Who Is Grieving

With children

- Use simple, honest words, such as “died” instead of “went away.”
- Expect the same questions again and again. That is how children process.
- Keep routines steady: meals, bedtime, school.
- Let them see you grieve, and see you cope.
- Give them ways to remember: drawings, photos, a memory box.

With teens and adults

- Show up. A text, a meal or a walk means a lot.
- Say their loved one’s name. It helps more than silence.
- Listen more than you advise.
- Remember hard dates: birthdays, holidays, anniversaries.
- Check in weeks and months later, not just at first.

Signs someone may need extra support

Grief has no timeline. But if someone stops eating or sleeping, pulls away from everyone for a long time, uses alcohol or drugs to cope, or talks about not wanting to live, help them reach a counselor or doctor. You don’t have to have all the answers. You just have to stay close.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Getting Help

988

Call or text the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, any time, day or night

741741

Text HOME to reach the Crisis Text Line

911

If someone is in immediate danger



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The Last Branch Foundation was created by Claudia Carr to honor the family she lost and to help others feel less alone in their grief. We offer free grief support across the High Desert.

- Grief support circles
- Online support
- Counseling referrals
- Remembrance and holiday events

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COMING NEXT

Episode 2: Opening the Door

The doors of The Last Branch Foundation open for the very first time. Claudia meets Grandpa Joe, little Lily and quiet Marcus, three people carrying grief of their own, and discovers what happens when hurting hearts sit in the same circle.





When Claudia lost her dad, she lost the last living member of her immediate family. But in her family's tree, branches don't fall. They bloom.

Inspired by my life. A story of love, loss and the family that keeps on growing, with activities for children, teens and grown-ups to share.

No one grieves alone.



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