

**Soul Love: How A Dog Taught Me To Breathe Again**  
**By Teresa. Q. Bitner**

When Kris dies unexpectedly in a motorcycle accident, Teresa and her two high school-aged sons must figure out life as a single mother and fatherless kids. They live on a 12.5-acre ranch in Texas, and keep several pet dogs—none as special as Hans, a brown Doberman that they adopt after Kris's death. Hans's wise brown eyes, which 'peer deeply into your soul,' convince Teresa that he was sent by God to be her personal grief dog. Over the next four years, Hans helps this broken family heal the anger, helplessness, and hopelessness that deep grief causes, teaching them how to forgive, love, and laugh again.

# SOUL LOVE

HOW A DOG TAUGHT ME  
TO BREATHE AGAIN



Teresa Q. Bitner

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**Tagline:** A Raw, Real, and Riveting Memoir of Tragedy to Triumph

**Book Info:**

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## Praise for Soul Love: How A Dog Taught Me To Breathe Again:

★★★★★ “ A Profound Journey This book made me laugh, made me cry (more times than I expected), and made me think deeply about my own life, how I’m living, and how I might deal with loss which I know I’ll face in my future.

I feel profoundly honored to have been able to peer into the raw, honest roller coaster that Teresa and her family travelled on through this journey of love, loss and renewal.

I have 20 books I’m actively reading, with wide and varied interest, so I was surprised to read this book and finish it in less than a week. It was an easy read, well written, and incredibly engaging. ~ Steve Mattus

★★★★★ “ Hope and inspiration in the shadow of death Soul Love is a moving memoir of a woman somehow navigating through unimaginable loss and the many layers and complexities of grief and challenges. Boldly finding her way as life goes on and people move on, the author offers us a vulnerable, raw look at her journey - sharing from a deep heartfelt place, with no holding back.

As I read my Advanced Reader Copy, I often caught myself holding my breath and crying in anguish along with her, riveted as if I was living this story through her. Soul Love is a story of evolution from widow to woman, to finding a “new normal” as a family. Hope and inspiration arise from witnessing this woman emerge from shock and anger to deep darkness and despair to vibrantly living again. Soul Love is a must-read for anyone who is grieving, for anyone who feels alone in this process, or for anyone who knows that one day they too will surely lose someone they love.”

- Barb Klein, author of 111 Invitations: Step into the Full Richness of Life

★★★★★ “ I found this book to be an easy read, as it flowed well from beginning to ...  
I found this book to be an easy read, as it flowed well from beginning to end. It was a very powerful story (get your tissues ready before reading the first few chapters) about a family’s tragedy, grief, and struggles as they learn to move forward with their new “normal”. The introduction of their new pet, Hans, and his comments as a grief dog gave the story a sense of hope throughout.

I was most impressed by the author’s willingness to be so vulnerable and share the dark emotions that haunt someone who has lost a loved one. She has a unique way of bringing the reader into the very moments that she experienced. I also enjoyed the fact that she included an Epilogue to let the reader know where things stand today. Hey, inquiring minds want to know, right?

Overall, I would highly recommend this book for anyone who wants to better understand what happens in the life of someone who has lost a loved one, not just immediately after, but over the next several years. This book offers some great insight into the process of recovery from such tragedy.” ~ Mark Smyth

See my testimonial page <https://www.boldfulfilledlifecoach.com/book-testimonials.html>

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[The Janis Underwood Show: Unleashing the Creator Within... For Real! Soul Love with Author Teresa Bitner](#)

## **Q & A**

- Where did you get the idea for this book?
- What traits and other tidbits do you share with your main character?
- Did any of your inspiration for this book originate in your real life experiences?
- What made you decide to self-publish?
- Are there any specific authors whose writing styles or subject matter inspired your book?
- Do you have another project in the works? If so, what is it?
- When you self publish, do you do it all yourself? (Be generous with credit, it comes back to you.)

## **Excerpt #1 (#199 words) The Beginning:**

**Kristopher (Kris) Paul Klein**, 42, died suddenly on October 27, 2009. His spouse of 20 years is Teresa Q. Klein. Kris was a dedicated husband and father. He was Scoutmaster for Troop 161 leading and inspiring numerous young men to the rank of Eagle Scout. Through his involvement in Scouting he was inducted into the Order of the Arrow Brotherhood and was nominated for the 100th Anniversary National Hall of Leadership. As an active member of his church, he chaired the board of trustees and was the Senior High Sunday School teacher. Mr. Klein held numerous positions during his 18-year tenure at Harte-Hanks, most recently Director of Telecommunications. He loved the outdoors and spent his time camping with his sons and the Boy Scout troop. His hobbies included RVing with his family, carpentry, and mechanical projects.

Thank you to the angels taking care of us during this difficult time and to all of the thoughts and prayers from friends and family. Isaiah 40:31 (New International Version) 31: *But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*

Published in *The Austin American-Statesman* on October 30, 2009.

## **Excerpt #2 Prologue (#556 words):**

I'm in heaven and having the best life ever for an animal. I sleep, eat, play, love, and just exist. Heaven is the greatest reward of all.

In heaven, all animals live in perfect harmony. Dogs and cats are buddies, foxes and hens are friends, fish and birds hang out having fun. No one has to fear being eaten or killed; we just live and are happy together. One of my best buddies is a big black cat named Niles.

During one of my romps around heaven, when I'm doing the dog thing sniffing and running to pee on each tree and bush, I see The Light—and a man coming toward me and Niles. *Oh wow, it's time for one of us to go on our mission! I wonder who will be picked. I'm ready!* Maybe, just maybe, He will pick me this time.

The man walks over to me, rubs my ears (*oh, I like that!*), and says, "I have a special job for you to do." I notice the man is very sad, smells new to heaven, and has really dark hair everywhere—like a dog. It's pretty cool that he's so hairy, but why is he so sad? He bends down to look into my eyes and keeps rubbing my ears. Oh, *ow*, I can see and feel his deep pain and anguish as a tear runs down his face.

"My wife and two teenage boys need you, buddy." He pauses to catch his breath and The Light places a hand on his shoulder in a reassuring manner. The man says tearfully, "I had to leave too quickly, so suddenly, and they really need love and support."

The Light informs me: "This will be a hard mission, but if you pay attention, listen to me, ask for my help, and just love them as best you can, you will be successful and grow your grief dog skills."

I bark with joy and excitement, "WOOF!" Yes, I want to be a great grief dog! *Wow, that's so awesome—I am going on a mission!* I so very much want to serve a family in need. I pause, sensing this man's raw, searing, gut-wrenching pain; he exudes profound grief.

He stares off into the sky, then covers his face with his hands and cries softly on my shoulder, "I never meant to leave without a goodbye. I won't be there for them. Who will protect them? Oh, God, please help them."

"I am so sorry, babe. What about the boys? Who will be there for them? This is too much for her and the boys; I need you, buddy."

I sit quietly, listening, absorbing the pain and licking his hands. I am a little scared about how big this mission might be and what life on Earth will be like, but I want to go on this mission and help this man and his family.

The Light asks, "Okay, are you ready for this mission? It's going to be big and challenging. You first have to be born and then grow into what you've been created for."

How could I not go? This man just poured out his pain. I agree with The Light: "I will go to Earth and do my best to love and support them."

"Seek me and I will guide you.

## Excerpt #Chapter 1 (# 1980 words)

Chapter 1: October 26, 2009

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I'm enjoying a normal life as a 6<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher, mom to two teenage boys, and the wife of an amazing man. We're the typical mid-forties parents: overweight and deep into raising our kids. I'm 43, 5'5", with dark curly hair I color with mahogany to cover my gray. Kris is 5'10", with thinning hair, and still has his rugged good looks. Together, we're living the American dream. At least it looks that way from the outside. Inside, well, we share the ups and downs that most couples do. Kris and I have been married 20 years. We were a young 22 and 23 when we got married. What the heck did we know other than that we loved each other? Love certainly helps, but it cannot prepare one for the challenges of marriage. We've survived Kris's multiple layoffs and my previously crazy high-tech career, both of us working endless hours. We've traveled all over the world, lived in the UK, created two boys, built our dream home, and coped with family deaths (among other personal struggles)—but we haven't always done so gracefully.

We have a senior and a freshman in high school. That's a milestone in our lives, and we thought we would be old when we got to this point. I don't feel so old now. The boys are in Boy Scouts of America (BSA): Korey's a 17-year-old Eagle Scout, and Kurtis, 14, is a Life Scout. If it helps, you can distinguish them by remembering that Korey has an 'o' in his name, and 'o' comes before 'u' in the alphabet. Both are acting like typical teenage boys. Neither is doing well in school and it frustrates us so much because they are otherwise brilliant and talented. Lately, they've been making poor choices, stretching the limits of our rules, and choosing to not work hard and get poor grades. I try to motivate and encourage them to live up to their potential, but more often than not it devolves into another family argument.

As they rumble in from tonight's Scout meeting, I hear the typical rough squabble. Kris and I are attempting to be good parents. The conversation goes something like this:

Kris, to Korey and Kurtis: "You know your number one job is school. You are responsible for your grades."

I interject, "We expect you to attend college, and you need good grades to get into the schools you want."

He even invokes Scouting: "What does the Scout Law say about doing your best, and being honest? We just want to see you succeed. We are here to help."

It sounds like a broken record to me and probably to the boys—same old discussion, and we go on and on. Tensions escalate. Korey yells, "You don't fucking understand, I *am* doing my best. You guys always yell at me!"

Kris yells back, "Don't talk to us like that. Show your mother some respect."

Kurtis insists, "It's the teacher's fault. I've got this, Mom and Dad, stop nagging me."

"Stop rolling your eyes or I'll pop you," Kris warns.

When more hurtful words are flung, we send the boys to their bedrooms for the rest of the evening.

I don't like ending our days like this, but it seems unavoidable at least weekly. I know my husband doesn't like it either; he looks exhausted from work and the Scout meeting tonight. Kris and I don't talk much after the explosive discussion. What is there to say? We've talked it through a thousand times already. We sit on either end of the couch, working on our

laptops and getting ready for tomorrow, failing to even acknowledge each other's frustration and pain. We are just too tired to do anything else.

After a while, I head up to bed, distracted by thoughts of work the next morning. "Goodnight," I murmur, offering a quick smooch.

"Goodnight, babe," Kris replies.

It is the last shred of "normal" we will ever have together as a couple or a family.

In a few hours' time, Normal will transition into Nightmare. What had seemed so important last night will become completely irrelevant with the dawning of the worst day in my entire life.

\*

The day begins as usual. Showers and breakfast and everyone out the door. However, something seems 'off' for most of the day. I can't quite grasp it, but there's this background kind of inkling that *something is not right*. I find myself staring off into space, sighing, and checking my phone between class periods. *Hmm, no texts from Kris. Okay, he must be busy. I know I am.* It's October and the enthusiasm of a new school year has faded. Teachers call it the 'fall wall,' where they begin to get frustrated, weary, and the joy of teaching becomes challenging.

By the afternoon, I know something is up when I finally go to the teachers' lounge to make copies. I stop to pick up the mail and a coffee and see my principal. She walks toward me and firmly grabs my arm. "Hey, Teresa, how are you?"

"Okay, busy trying to get things done between classes, you know." Thinking to myself, *Um, why on earth is she grabbing my arm? This is not normal. Uh-oh, did I do something wrong?*

She starts pulling me toward her office, saying, "I need you to come with me and talk for a minute." Through the window in the office door I see a room full of dour, sad, and serious-looking people—administrators, staff, and a state trooper.

*No way am I going in there!* I think. I look at her and say, "Mmm, now's not a good time. I have to make copies and get back to my classroom before class starts." My mind is screaming: *Something's up and it looks bad, very bad.* I feel the sudden urge to run fast and far away.

Heedless, the principal ushers me into the office. "No, I really need you to come with me to my office, NOW."

My head races and swirls with fear and anticipation of the bad news I know must be coming as she escorts me into a chair. *Did something happen to a student? Did I do something bad as a teacher? Yikes, I hope I don't get arrested or end up on TV. Okay, deep breath ...*

*Pretty sure I didn't do anything like that. Oh no, did something happen to one of my kids? Is Korey in trouble again at school? Must be bad; they usually call Kris, not me. Did Kris wreck that damn motorcycle? Are my elderly parents okay? Fear creeps into every particle of my being. What the hell could be this horrible?*

Standing there, I look up. *Why is everyone staring at me? Why do all of the school staff look like they have been crying? Why are they holding wadded tissues? Yowza, I know something massive is up.* My stomach drops. I feel sick and nearly vomit. Something very grim must have happened. Oh, God, help me.

"Ms. Klein, please sit down. We have some terrible news," says Trooper Joe. Used, crumpled, and ripped tissues from school-issue grey tissue boxes line the table and floor. Every assistant principal is present, seated around the principal's table. The trooper, wearing his tan uniform, gun, Taser, handcuffs, and gold badge, sits at my right, directly across from a Family Services lady in a drab county uniform and black windbreaker. Trooper Joe says, "First, I need to ask you some questions, for my investigation."

With a dry, sick mouth, I mumble: "Sure, what investigation?" *POP!* My head starts reeling and my rational brain evaporates. *INVESTIGATION? What the hell?*

The poor trooper never sees it coming. My reaction is so raw, he doesn't quite know how to respond. I ask him in a loud, terrified Yankee voice I don't recognize, "What the fuck is this all about? Who's in trouble or dead?" I'm yelling because I know whatever it is, it's BAD, very BAD. You don't see a room full of school administrators and a trooper asking questions for his investigation when it's just routine student-in-trouble stuff. I'm originally from New York and I go New York crazy—complete with lots of cursing and yelling in zero to three seconds when confronted with a crisis. I can deal with a crisis, just no bull-shitting around.

"Give it to me straight. I want to know exactly what happened and I want to know NOW."

The trooper tries calmly asking me, "Is Kristopher Paul Klein your husband?"  
"Yes, damn it, of course he is."

"Ma'am, what time did you leave the house?"

I ramble on incoherently: "Um, oh, ah, I don't know, oh jeez, what's wrong ... ?"

When no one answers, I blurt out: "Shit, I don't know—early, between 7:00 and 7:30."

"What time did your husband leave the house?"

Mind reeling out of control, "I know he didn't leave before me. He stayed up later than I did, working downstairs. He was just getting up when I left. No clue what time he actually left for work. He might have had calls to take at the house. Sometimes he takes conference calls then drives to work. The boys were up getting ready; I assume they went to school. Kris was supposed to make sure ... "

I keep trying to listen to the questions and answer correctly. In my irrational state, I believe that giving only "correct" answers can make a difference. Of course, the damage is done.

Terrified, I start asking questions. "What is wrong? What's going on? Who's dead or injured? Where are my kids? Where is my husband?" I'm getting louder, more and more desperate for an answer. I have to KNOW.

Then the trooper asks, "Does your husband ride a motorcycle?"

"Well yes, that motherfucker rides a fucking bike! Where is he? What's happened?"

I begin to really scream, becoming hysterical. Trooper Joe grabs my hand and looks into my eyes with tears in his. "I'm sorry, ma'am. He's been killed in a motorcycle accident."

*HOLY SHIT!* ... my brain explodes. I literally think I will die right there. My heart has been ripped open and my world has stopped. I am SO mad, sad, and freaked out I fear my soul might just fly into a million fractured pieces. I scream and wail loudly at the top of my lungs, "FUCK, no, no, no, no, FUCK ... I KNEW that would happen, that motherfucker would die on that damn thing!" I pound the table with my fists, slump over and bang my head while screaming and sobbing in anguish for what seems like forever. My assistant principals and

principal all hug me, cry with me, and attempt to comfort me. Someone grabs my hands to stop me from pounding the table. Another person grabs me from behind to stop my head banging. The weeping and words of comfort in the background buzz like bees.

I have no idea how long I scream, cry, rage, wail, and cuss. I am what my students would call a hot mess. Hoarse and emotionally wrung out, a while passes before I stop crying and think to ask, "Was it on SH-45? On the curve?" I know Kris liked to go over 100mph around that bend.

The trooper answers, "No, it was at 9:45 a.m. at an intersection near the house, less than a mile from your home."

"But we live in the country on a ranch," I protest. "How could he have had an accident way out there?"

The trooper continues with details: "A woman turned in front of him and he ran into her truck's front quarter panel."

Rage, sorrow, and more questions flood my mind. "Was he in pain? Did he die quickly?" There is so much I need to know.

## About the Author

Teresa Q. Bitner - PMP, M.Ed., ACC

Teresa is a professional coach, speaker, and author specializing in resiliency, change, and loss. She is passionate about partnering with those who have been knocked down by life and want to build resiliency and move forward to a bold life. Teresa has been coaching and mentoring professionals for over 20 years in various roles as an IT software developer, project manager, educator, mentor, and leader. Teresa brings to the coaching relationship many unique and challenging life experiences including career transitions, personal losses of first spouse and mother and forging resiliency amidst chaos. Her company Bold Fulfilled Life Coach helps anyone grieving a loss of any kind to claw their way out of the deep, dark abyss. Teresa is also a wife and the proud mother of two adult sons and two wily dogs, living in Austin, TX.

[PMP - Professional Project Manager Certification, M. Ed. – Masters in Education Curriculum and Instruction – Math & Science, ACC = Associate Certified Coach with the International Coach Federation]

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