

# Clarke's Original

In May 2025, Mary Grace Baker stood in her school's church surrounded by her classmates, teachers, and family. She was receiving the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Award - the highest honor at St. Anne's. The moment celebrated her character and the kindness and joy she brought to everyone around her. We gathered there to honor the way she lived her faith and touched our lives.

And if we closed our eyes tight, we could almost imagine a world where that beautiful ceremony was just the first page of a long and joyful life story.

But reality had other plans.

Just a few weeks later, we found ourselves in church once again, with the same faces - classmates, teachers and loved ones - not celebrating Mary Grace's award, but celebrating Mary Grace's far-too-brief life.

My name is Clarke Baker. I am Mary Grace's father, and I'm here to make sure that nobody has to experience what I have over the last 8 months.

I'll be honest in saying I don't really know how 'this' works. I have no clue how to navigate these halls. I don't understand House hearings, lobbyists, floor debates... What I do know is that my daughter should still be here. Her death was 100% preventable

Complacency, among other things, led to the deaths of 27 amazing, innocent, beautiful girls. We can't let complacency claim the life of another child. We simply ask for mandatory, common-sense, state-regulated safety protocols for camps. That's it.

One thing that I forgot to mention is that we're from Beaumont, Texas. We know about natural disasters. And we understand that Mother Nature can rear her ugly head. But that's not an excuse. Camps, especially those in rural areas prone to flash floods, should have adequate warning systems and not build cabins in dangerous flood areas. Period. Surely, don't put 8 and 9 year olds in them. Have a legitimate evacuation plan. Know the plan. Practice the plan. Train workers and counselors to implement the plan.

To be clear, I don't want to shut down the entire camp industry. Generally speaking, camps are great. Hell, Mary Grace was having so much fun, she didn't have time to write her family.

Hurricane Harvey hit Beaumont. Hard. And the very next year, we were blasted by Hurricane Imelda. These disasters were both considered "500 year" floods. When this happens again, it probably won't be a flood. Mother Nature makes no excuses, and the only way to enjoy nature is to understand her wrath. Let's create an environment in Maryland where campers can be safe. If schools and daycares are required to be licensed and have emergency evacuation plans, surely a place where your child is left overnight should be.

Please. Please don't let another session pass without ensuring campers will come home.

CLARKE: THE BELOW IS MY DRAFT. I DELETED QUITE A BIT - I'M NOT SURE HOW LONG YOU HAVE TO TESTIFY AND (FRANKLY) IT NEEDED TO BE TRIMMED. SOMETIMES, LESS IS MORE. IN ANY EVENT, I DIDN'T WANT TO DELETE YOUR STATEMENT, SO I COPY-PASTED MY DRAFT BELOW. GIVE'EM HELL.

Good Morning,

In May, just three months ago, my daughter – Mary Grace Baker – stood in her school's church surrounded by classmates, teachers, and family. She was receiving her school's highest honor – the Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Award. It was a celebration of Mary Grace's faith, character, and joy she brought to everyone around her.

And now – if we close our eyes tight and think about that day – we were so proud of Mary Grace. This would be the first of many awards for her.

But reality had other plans.

Just a few weeks after receiving the award, we found ourselves in another church with the same classmates and the same teachers. But this time, there were a lot more faces. A lot more friends and family. And a lot more tears.

This was a different type of celebration. We weren't celebrating Mary Grace's award – we were celebrating her eight years of life on earth. The happiest eight years of my life.

Losing a child is impossible to comprehend, unless you've experienced it. My wife and I have had our fair share of losses – my wife lost her grandmother and I lost my mother. Somehow, little Mary Grace was our family's light during those dark moments.

The picture you are seeing was my last living memory of my daughter. I would give anything to back to that day.

***Clarke: I copy-pasted the bullet points below because I'm not sure if you're tasked with saying them (if you are, move the bullets back into the body of the text).***

- **Prevention** - Let's move structures away from flood-ways, flood plains, and other hazardous areas.
- **Detection** - How about camps maintain 24/7 monitoring of alerts and adequate notification systems for emergency situations?
- **Training** - There should be additional standards for evacuation plans like having emergency drills for campers and staff

**Response** - Ready and set don't mean anything until you say 'go.' So let's require emergency management to formally trigger a campsite response.