



WELCOME TO THE

Newsletter

I'm so glad you're here!

Compassion in the Face of Misunderstanding

April has always reminded me that progress and understanding don't always move at the same pace. In advocacy, this is especially true.

As many Florida legislative decisions are finalized this month, I'm reminded of the journey to pass the Mark Wandall Traffic Safety Act, which paved the way for the use of red-light safety cameras in Florida. Along the way, I encountered differing perspectives, hesitation, and at times, misunderstanding. Yet I learned that my compassion often opened doors that frustration never could. Change takes time, and understanding grows through patience, perseverance, and shared purpose.

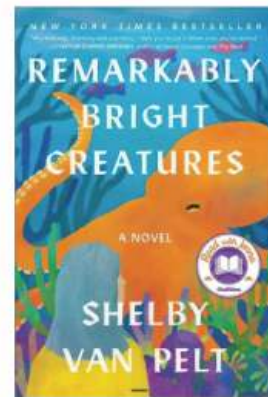
This same lesson resonates deeply as we reflect on another meaningful milestone, the completion of The Mark Wandall Foundation's 2026 3-Day Bereavement Camp in partnership with Comfort Zone Camp. Grief is often misunderstood. It doesn't follow a timeline, and it rarely looks the same from one person to the next. What may seem like resilience on the outside can still hold quiet struggles within. Whether in advocacy or in supporting grieving youth, compassion for misunderstanding allows us to lead with empathy, build trust, and create lasting impact. Sometimes the most meaningful progress begins when we choose understanding over assumption.

Melissa Wandall

My Summer Book Recommendation

REMARKABLY BRIGHT CREATURES

One book that stayed with me is Remarkably Bright Creatures by Shelby Van Pelt. The novel is a gentle reminder that sometimes taking a hard look at the past can help uncover a future that once felt impossible.



Comfort Zone Camp Recap

Thanks to our incredible volunteers, supporters, and donors, our 11th Annual Bereavement Camp welcomed 62 children, teens, and young adults who have experienced the death of a parent, guardian, or sibling.

This special weekend created space for connection, friendship, and shared understanding—reminding each participant they are not alone.

[View the special moments →](#)

A promotional graphic for the 2026 Giving Challenge. The left side has a yellow background with text: "2026 Giving Challenge", "NOON TO NOON", "APRIL 15-16", "We create spaces where youth find comfort and connection after the death of a parent, guardian, or sibling.", "The MARK WANDALL FOUNDATION", and "www.TheMarkWandallFoundation.org". The right side features a photo of a smiling woman and three children wearing helmets. A blue circular badge in the bottom right says "2026 GIVING CHALLENGE" and "Be The One". At the bottom, it says "BE THE ONE" in large letters and "Presented by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County".

2026 Giving Challenge

NOON TO NOON
APRIL 15-16

We create spaces
where youth find
comfort and
connection after the
death of a parent,
guardian, or sibling.

 **The MARK WANDALL FOUNDATION**
www.TheMarkWandallFoundation.org

2026 GIVING CHALLENGE
Be The One

BE THE ONE

Presented by the
Community Foundation of Sarasota County

Giving Challenge 2026: Because of You

The 2026 Giving Challenge was a powerful reminder of what's possible when a community comes together.

In just 24 hours, 104 donors contributed \$21,350, with an additional \$9,200 in matching funds, bringing our total to \$30,550. Among 751 nonprofits, The Mark Wandall Foundation ranked 152nd overall—our most successful Giving Challenge to date.

These gifts directly support programs that help children, teens, and young adults navigate grief after the death of a loved one—providing safe spaces to understand emotions, build resilience, and move forward.

As one supporter shared, “If grief is devastating for adults, imagine what it feels like for a child.”

Because of you, connection is possible. Because of you, lives are changed.

[Learn More →](#)

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APRIL IS NATIONAL DISTRACTED DRIVING
AWARENESS MONTH



THE REAL COST OF DISTRACTED DRIVING: A CHOICE WE ALL CONTROL

Last month, we partnered with the [Kiefer Foundation](#) and [StopDistractions.org](#) to amplify awareness around Distracted Driving Month.

Through this collaboration, we've brought attention to the real and lasting impact of distracted driving and the importance of making safer choices behind the wheel. This month and every month is a great reminder to put down those distractions!

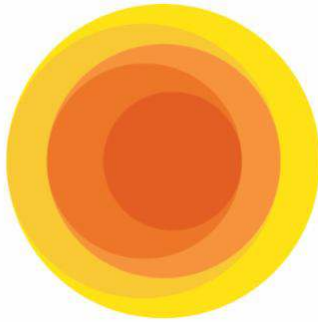


Reconnect Recap: Everglades Experience

In March, our families came together for a memorable day at the Everglades Alligator Farm.

From an exciting airboat ride across the Everglades to an up-close alligator experience, the day was filled with moments of connection, laughter, and time to simply be together.

Thank you to our generous sponsors—Coldwell Banker, Schmitt Real Estate Co., and Florida Care Management Services Agency—for making this meaningful experience possible.



Suncoast Credit Union

Donor Spotlight

This opportunity was made possible through a generous \$5,000 grant from Suncoast Credit Union.

Because of their support, four Florida youth were able to attend our recent 3-Day Bereavement Camp—gaining tools, connection, and support during a pivotal time in their lives.

Partnerships like this allow us to continue investing in children and helping them build strong, supported futures. Thank you.



I recently attended a two-day [Alert Today Florida](#) meeting focused on pedestrian and bicycle safety across our state.

These conversations continue to move important safety initiatives forward—creating safer communities for everyone.

[See April Speaking Highlights](#)

upcoming Speaking
Engagements



I'm grateful for continued opportunities to share this mission and connect with communities.

MAY:

- On May 18, I will serve as a keynote presenter at the [IPTM Symposium on Traffic Safety](#) in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, speaking on responsibility, resilience, and the shared commitment we all hold in preventing tragedy and saving lives on our roadways.

JUNE:

- On June 24, I will also be speaking at the [Manatee County Bar Association](#)'s Annual Meeting, sharing the programs and impact of [The Mark Wandall Foundation](#).
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Book Melissa Wandall: Empowering Audiences with Resilience, Faith, and Action

One-to-One Mentoring Opportunities

If you're feeling overwhelmed or unsure where to begin, I am opening a limited number of one-to-one mentoring opportunities. Together, we will clarify YOUR purpose, strengthen your strategy, and turn your passion into meaningful progress.

If this speaks to you, I invite you to take the next step. Email me with the subject line "Mentoring," and include a brief note about your goals.

Contact Me!

WWW.MELISSAWANDALLADVOCATE.COM



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