

The Picture I Couldn't Find



This is the best picture I know of with the three Connor brothers — Michael on the left, Keith in the middle, and Fran on the right.

It's 2026, and the only person still alive in this photo is Fran, my husband of more than twenty-five years.

Michael died on March 17, 2003. Keith just died on February 23, 2026.

Since Keith died, I've tried my best to memorialize him with photos, anecdotes, and stories from friends, colleagues, and family. I want the record of his life to exist somewhere outside of grief and paperwork and the slow logistics that follow death.

I've kept this photo in its original frame for 27 years. It has shifted from bookcase to bookcase as we moved, but I've always treasured it. Fran doesn't really value photos the way I do. He has almost none from his childhood because of a fire, and every time I try to sneak a random picture he gets annoyed.

"Don't post that on social media or we'll get a divorce," he jokes. (I think he's joking.)

Recently I had to pack things up in my bedroom because we're getting the carpet replaced. The photo had been sitting on a shelf, and suddenly I couldn't remember if I packed it in a box in the closet or one in the garage.

The idea that it might be lost unsettled me more than I expected. It wasn't just a picture I couldn't find. It was the moment when all three brothers were still here. Alive and healthy.

So I reached out to Michael's wife to see if she had photos of the three brothers. I described the picture and explained how much it meant to me.

This was a huge mistake.

I tried to write a kind message. I explained that I was collecting photos for a memorial page. I told her about this photo and how upset I was that I couldn't find it.

The response I received shocked me to my core. For a moment I just sat there staring at the screen, thinking only: *What the hell is wrong with you people?*

Instead of a simple no, or silence, or even a polite deflection, the message was filled with anger about the past — anger that felt directed at me. Old grievances resurfaced. Accusations about things that happened decades ago. Things that cannot be undone and, in many cases, cannot even be clearly remembered by the people still alive.

The anger unleashed on me when I was already grieving cracked something open.

I suddenly found myself spiraling.

I couldn't easily recover to continue doing the things I needed to do to honor Keith and retrieve his belongings from an apartment complex that seems determined not to answer my emails or follow the law.

Instead, I was stuck in a loop:

Do I deserve this pain?

Am I a masochist for reaching out?

Was I too optimistic?

Or was the photo simply too important not to try?

The rumination tortured me. I'm usually very task-oriented. When something happens, I make lists, solve problems, move forward. **No choice but action.**

But grief mixed with family history is different.

Friends tried to pull me out.

One wrote:

"I can see why you're ruminating and why it's amplifying your sadness. Give yourself grace. It's not your job to fix Fran's family. You are such a kind, giving person. But you can only do so much and the past can't be changed."

Another said simply:

"Family relationships are tricky. It's obvious she hasn't found a way to forgive."

A final reminder:

“Many people can barely handle their own pain.”

What struck me most about the exchange was how differently two people can experience the same history. My message had been an attempt — maybe imperfect, but sincere — to reconnect for a purpose: to honor Keith.

Her reply made clear that for her, those old wounds are still very alive.

Grief has a strange way of reopening every other unresolved thing around it.

**I found the photo on my own.
Like I do with so many things.**

Three brothers in a picture from 1999.

Michael on the left.
Keith in the middle.
Fran on the right.

Two gone.
One still here.

The picture hadn't changed in twenty-seven years, but the people who remember it have.

And the memories that remain are not shared equally.

Music has always been part of the Connor brothers' lives, though they rarely agreed on what counts as a good song.

I process things through music, and these are the songs that stayed with me while I tried to figure out what it would take to find this picture.

The Picture I Couldn't Find — Playlist

1. Coming Up Close — 'Til Tuesday

“One day it will come back to me”

2. There Is a Light That Never Goes Out — Razed In Black / The Smiths

“There is a light that never goes out”

3. Could We Start Again, Please? — Sara Bareilles

“I didn't mean to hurt you”

4. (Just Like) Starting Over — John Lennon

“Our life together is so precious”

5. Fix You — Coldplay

“When you try your best but you don’t succeed”

6. WTF Is Wrong With You People? — Combichrist

“What the hell is wrong with you people?”

7. Little Voice — Sara Bareilles

“Looking over the precious moments, it hurts don’t it?”

8. Thank You for Hearing Me — Sinéad O'Connor

“Thank you for tearing me apart

Now I’m a strong, strong heart”

9. Live and Let Live — Peter Gabriel

“It takes courage (courage) to start to forgive”

10. I Saved the World Today — Eurythmics

“I’m grieving”

11. Right Here — The Go-Betweens

“Don’t go away.”

12. Whatever Gets You Thru the Night — John Lennon

“Do it wrong or do it right”