

# LETTERS FROM DABO - Part 10

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Tigerillustrated.com

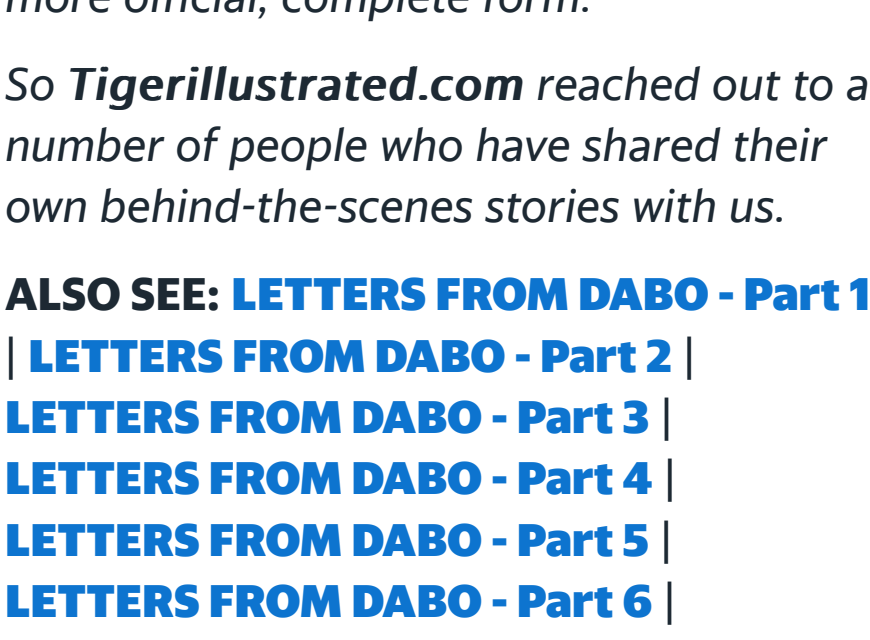
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**Dabo Swinney's** extraordinary ability to lift a football program is known to everyone who even casually follows the sport.

*But what about his gift, equally extraordinary, of lifting the spirits of those who are going through periods of struggle?*

*These to-date unpublicized gestures -- random acts of Dabo, if you will -- are very much worthy of being documented in a more official, complete form.*

So **Tigerillustrated.com** reached out to a number of people who have shared their own behind-the-scenes stories with us.

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**Here is Part 10**

**Steve Grant** had always been an optimistic person.

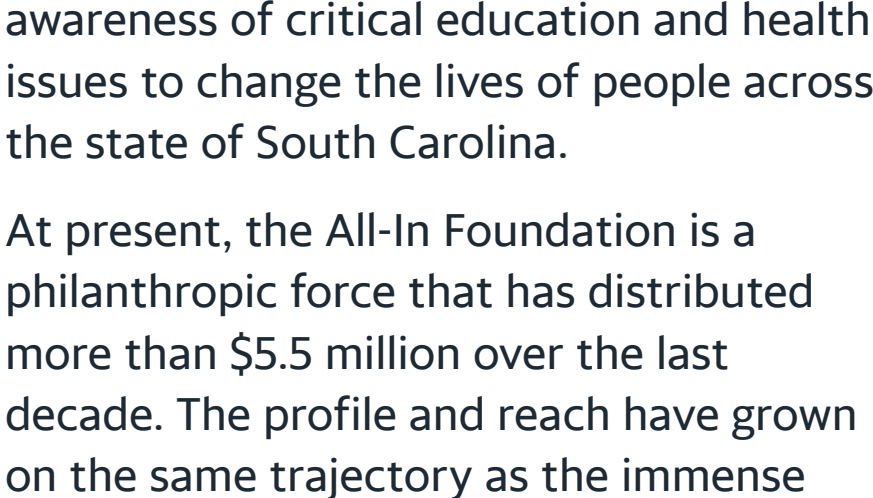
The day was partly sunny, not partly cloudy. He'd regularly hang positive messages on his sons' mirrors when they were children, including: "The cross doesn't get too heavy."

The power of positivity might as well have been in another galaxy for Grant after he lost both his sons to drug overdoses over a five-year stretch between 2005 and 2010.

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There's no way to ease into this: For his oldest son **Chris**, a seven-year battle with addiction ended at age 21 when he died of a cocaine and methadone overdose. For his younger son **Kelly**, a rapid spiral in 2010 ended when he overdosed on heroin at age 24.

Steve was the one who found both of his sons. He also lost his wife of 25 years to divorce after their sons' problems drove them apart.



There was no silver lining anymore, no glasses that stood half-full. In the worst of his grief, Grant hurt so deeply that he believed there'd never be anything in his life but sadness and despair.

The turning point came less than two years later, at a sales conference. Grant, then a financial representative at Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance, found himself in a small cluster of people. Each was asked to stand and recite what he they wanted their legacy to be.

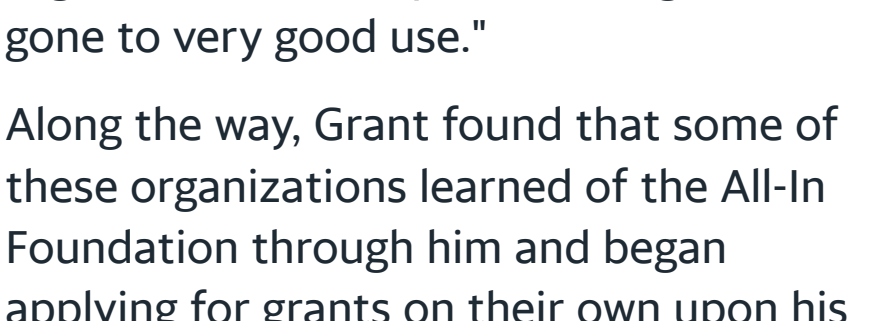
At first Grant was reluctant to stand, but then he did. And then came his life-turning revelation: He told the crowd that he wanted to be defined by doing everything he could to to save adolescent boys and girls from the ravages of drug addiction.

Chris and Kelly's HOPE Foundation was thus born in February of 2012, at the same time **Dabo Swinney's** football program was taking off at Clemson.

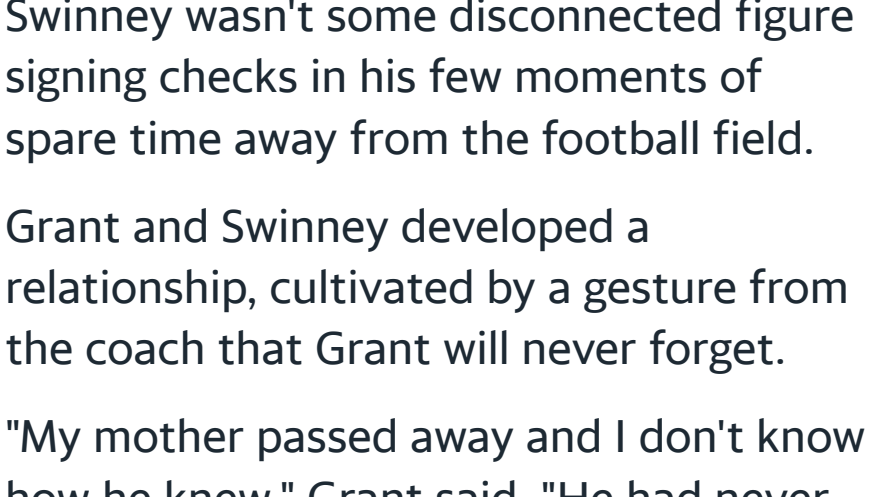
Not just a football program, but a culture. Part of that culture was Dabo's All-In Foundation, which was formed to raise awareness of critical education and health issues to change the lives of people across the state of South Carolina.

At present, the All-In Foundation is a philanthropic force that has distributed more than \$5.5 million over the last decade. The profile and reach have grown on the same trajectory as the immense success enjoyed on the field by Swinney's program, which has won two national titles since 2016 and reached the College Football Playoff five consecutive years.

Back in 2012, Grant was a shattered man trying to turn his life around by doing something good. And Swinney was a coach who was trying to lay the groundwork for big things on the football field while also dreaming of being a game-changer within the community.



Grant and Swinney were both on the board for Family Effect, a Greenville-based mission devoted to reducing addiction as a leading cause of family collapse and harm to children. Family Effect oversees Serenity Place, which provides a residential treatment center for pregnant women and young mothers with preschool-age children. Family Effect also raises money for White Horse Academy, which offers a residential treatment program for adolescent males and females.



Confronting addiction has been one of Swinney's passions dating to his high school and college days, when his father's alcohol abuse wrecked the family and left Swinney's mother **Carol** without a home.

Swinney took notice of Grant's foundation.

Grant: "One day his brother **Tracy** said to me: 'Dabo has an All-in Foundation. We would like to make a gift to you.' I said, 'Really? That's very nice of you.'"

Chris and Kelly's Hope foundation has raised close to \$1 million over its eight-year existence, and Swinney's foundation has cut a check each year as Grant spreads the money around to various causes and organizations in South Carolina related to addressing drug and alcohol abuse.

"This foundation has become a conduit to helping organizations that are devoted to education, the science of addiction and aftercare recovery," Grant said. "I realized there were a lot of little organizations around that didn't really have the bandwidth to raise money, but they needed money and they were good programs. Every year I've tried to give money to three or four of these organizations to help them along. And it's gone to very good use."

Along the way, Grant found that some of these organizations learned of the All-In Foundation through him and began applying for grants on their own upon his recommendation.

"They would call me back and say: 'Hey, Dabo gave me \$1,000 or \$2,500,'" Grant said. "It doesn't matter to me who gets the money, as long as someone gets the money. Dabo's family background, with his father's battle with alcoholism, gives him a soft spot for things like this."

As the years went on, Grant learned that Swinney wasn't some disconnected figure signing checks in his few moments of spare time away from the football field.

Grant and Swinney developed a relationship, cultivated by a gesture from the coach that Grant will never forget.

"My mother passed away and I don't know how he knew," Grant said. "He had never met my mother, but he sent me a card and then called me up to talk to me."



In addition to his full-time job as managing director for MassMutual in South Carolina and his part-time philanthropic pursuits, the 61-year-old Grant recently became an author.

In "Don't Forget Me: A Lifeline of Hope for Those Touched by Substance Abuse and Addiction," Grant recounts his sons' drug use and the things he knows now that he wishes he knew when they were still alive.

The book's title comes from a photo of Chris taken when he was a ninth-grader playing soccer. On the back of it, Chris wrote: "Don't forget me."

Grant still thinks of his sons daily. He doesn't get emotional much. But at least once a week, he'll be reminded of something and he'll go find some place private to weep.

On the whole, though, helping others keeps him invigorated. And optimistic.

In Grant's world, the day is partly sunny once again.

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