



where brothers and sisters are heard

THE SIBLING

Voice

april - june 2011

## i believe

by jason pitts

I believe in people. It was my brother, Stephen, who taught me that. When I was 13 years old he was diagnosed with leukemia. When he was 19 he passed away and so did my world as I knew it.

When I asked Stephen if he believed in God, he said, "I don't know if I believe in God, but I do know I believe in people." These words resonate in my mind and my heart, and I believe those words

as I say them to myself every minute of every hour of every day.

It's people who comfort my silent pain and quiet my tears. It's my mother who wraps her arms around me to warm my

broken heart. It's my father who stands next to me and gives me confidence to take the next step. It's my friends who listen to my journey and walk alongside me. It's my teachers who give me knowledge and create a place where I can discover who I am. It's my guitar that plays with passion from my soul and keeps me sane.

It's people who keep me from loneliness and continual pain. People, old and new, that challenge my fears and hold my hand. It's in my relationship with people that I learn how to love and be loved, like my beloved brother.

Last year, my godmother's son, who is my close friend, visited Israel. Before he left for the trip, he asked my brother if he wanted to write a note to be placed in the Western Wall, thinking that my brother might want to write

about his situation, maybe ask God to improve his health. My brother, of course, graciously accepted the offer. He wrote it and gave it to my friend. Before it was put in the wall, my friend secretly read the note, was very moved by the message, and felt inclined to tell my godmother about it.

There was nothing about my brother or his disease in the note. Not one word about

himself. What he did include in the note was how much he loved his family. The people he believed in. He said he loves his parents and brother very much and wants us to live long, happy lives. He wants us

to do good things. He also wrote that he wants the world to be a better place for others and wants the people in his life to contribute to making that happen. I hope we can all take a part of that message with us and live by it.

Over a year has passed since I held my brother tightly and helped him with each step... since his voice told me that he loves me. Over a year since I rushed home from school to see him, and over a year since my nightmare came true.

Time keeps moving and I'm moving with it, and I will remember his words always: "I don't know if I believe in God, but I do know I believe in people."

» To share with Jason, please contact him at [jasonpitts.music@gmail.com](mailto:jasonpitts.music@gmail.com)



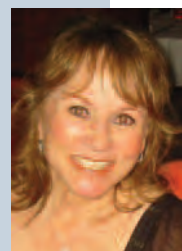
## THE SIBLING Voice

is for everyone to read, not just siblings

After launching our first Sibling Voice in January, we received wonderful comments about a "deeply needed, meaningful, and helpful newsletter." However, I was surprised when I asked some parents if they had actually *read* the Sibling Voice, and they said, "No. I thought it was just for siblings."

Both the Sibling Voice and the Parent Journey are written for everyone, since they are both designed to provide: (1) love, hope, education, and support for siblings and parents; and, (2) education for absolutely everyone else so others will know what siblings and parents go through AND what others can do to be a positive part of the process as the bereaved rebuild their lives.

Educating oneself about grief and all that the grieving process entails is as important as educating oneself about a newly diagnosed disease. If you or someone you love were recently diagnosed with a disease, the first thing everyone would do is learn everything known about that disease. But the process the bereaved goes through requires equal dedication and education. That is where our newsletters come in. And when dealing with the death of a child or sibling, the education becomes essential, since the journey is so difficult and continues throughout one's lifetime. So, to everyone everywhere, please read all of our newsletters so you, too, may understand and know how to give the love, support, and hope that will truly make a loving and healing difference in the lives of those you care about.



~ Susan Whitmore  
founder & president

# remembering bill

by priska neely

Here's a dilemma that I encounter on a regular basis:

I meet someone new and in the midst of small-talk and conversations about the weather, someone asks me: "So do you have siblings?" I say, "Yes, I have two older sisters." Then comes the problematic follow-up, "Oh! Your Dad got all girls, huh?"

Here's where the tension sets in. If I open up and share the truth, that there was a boy in the family, my older brother Bill who died ten years ago, awkwardness ensues. This isn't exactly the conversation you expect to have after asking someone where they grew up. But shrugging that comment off doesn't feel right either. Because there was a boy in the family.

Bill Gareth Neely was sixteen years older than me. He wasn't thrilled when my parents decided to have me. He was about to go off to college, and he thought he wouldn't be able to be part of my life. That turned out to be very far from the truth. He was a huge part of my life and always took time out for me. When we went places together, everyone thought he was my Dad. He taught me so much about music and contributed to the eclectic taste I have now. When other people in middle school were listening to the Spice Girls, I was listening to Wyclef Jean or the Beatles.

I thought he was so cool, and I believed pretty much everything he told me when I was little. One time, he told me a story about a guy he saw running down the street. First his arms fell off, but he kept running, then his legs fell off, and he just bounced down the street and kept going until there was nothing left but a head rolling along. My response: "Reallyyyy!?!?" I didn't even question it.

Perhaps the most embarrassing time was when he told me that jump roping was an Olympic sport. I had a mild interest in jumping rope at the time, but after learning this information I really set my sights high and started training. I would just jump rope by myself for about 25 minutes. Every day. I was five at the time. This went on for months. And I think my sisters just started to feel bad for me and told me the truth. Dreams were crushed. I am still pretty good at jump roping and have awkwardly large calves to this day from all the training.

This year, on his birthday (he would have been 40) I shared some memories of him on

Facebook, and some friends posted their memories as well. One of my friends shared a story of another ridiculous thing my brother convinced us to do when we were little. "I'll never forget when he told us that we had to stick our hands out of his sunroof in order to solar power the car or it would shut off," she said.

He was extremely easy going and was always making jokes. When the ball dropped New Year's 2000, we all gasped for a moment thinking our Y2K fears had come true, then quickly realized that he had just flicked off the lights.

“On Bill’s gravestone is one of his favorite sayings: ‘I wish you success in all of your failures.’ I wonder if he knew those would also be the words that have helped me heal.”



Priska and Bill on Priska's 13th birthday, the last birthday they would celebrate together.

He was also quite serious, and he accomplished so much in his years. He started a graphic design business when he was 18, opened a coffee shop in D.C., and he was about to launch an Internet shopping website just before he died. In 2000, he was included in the Washington Metropolitan Top Forty Under 40.

So, he was pretty much the coolest person in my life at the time, and his death came out of nowhere. He hadn't been sick. He had a cold the week before, but nothing major. He died suddenly in January 2001, just a couple of weeks after his thirtieth birthday.

I'm actually the last person that we know of who talked to him. It was a really dumb conversation about a debate I needed to give at school about gun control. He was helping me with my note cards. I wish it had been a more interesting conversation. I never got to even give the debate because I missed school when he died.

Bill died in his apartment from a heart disease that none of us knew about. I was thirteen at the time so, needless to say, my peers didn't exactly understand how to react. I called one of my friends right after I found out. He didn't know what to say, but he just listened as I cried my heart out, confused and shocked and angry and heartbroken. Over the years I've learned that that is the most helpful reaction, just listening. It's not awkwardly shifting your eyes, apologizing profusely, or coming back with an equally depressing story about a loss in your life (which is so easy to do).

Firing back with some type of cheerful adage also doesn't help. *He's in a better place.* Really? How is that supposed to make me feel? *Heaven just needed another angel in the choir.* I'm sure there are other ways to recruit. *God knows best.* Well, that may be true, but unless He's going to write the explanations on the wall for me, that doesn't help either.

They also say time heals all wounds. That's a lovely thought, but there's no combination of hours, minutes, or Neosporin that could stop the aching I feel in my heart when I think about him. I'll never stop missing him.

Things do get better though.

I can talk about him without feeling awful, without holding back tears or giving up and letting them break free. The other day my sister said something that reminded me of



“Over the years I’ve learned that that is the most helpful reaction, just listening. It’s not awkwardly shifting your eyes, apologizing profusely, or coming back with an equally depressing story about a loss in your life (which is so easy to do).”

him and I just said, “Bill would have liked that.” That’s a pretty big step, because for a while I would never mention him to family for fear of making them sad.

I can actually think about things that he would like and imagine sharing them. He was so tech savvy and had a cell phone, a digital camera, and an Apple computer way before they were cool. I wish he could see all the iGadgets that are out now. I’m sure he’d actually be living it up in Silicon Valley.

I went to dinner with my family recently and I was eating with chopsticks... I can do it pretty well and my Mom just said, “Did Bill teach you that?” I said yes, and we moved on. Several years ago, something this simple could have activated the water works. I remember the day my sister and her husband got a new car. They knocked on the front door and pointed to the car on the street. I immediately burst into tears. My Mom was so confused as to what was wrong, but my sister knew. Right away she told everyone, “It’s a Maxima.” It wasn’t even the same color or model, but seeing it in front of the house set me off. Two years after his death, I could barely say his name. It’s not that I’m forgetting, I’ll never forget. I’m just learning to breathe.

Things are better, but January is always a hard month for the family whether we realize it or not. Sometimes I’ll be having a bad day and then I’ll glance at the calendar and realize it was the day we found him, or the last day I talked to him, or the day of his funeral. Nearly a thousand people came to the funeral.

Many of them have kind of dropped out of our lives since. For some, especially his closest friends, it’s just too painful.

It hurts to know that I can’t tell him that I went to NYU and that I got a job and that... I want to tell him everything. That I write lots of songs and use his guitar to do it. That I’m not afraid of answering the phone anymore and cold-calling people is part of my daily life. That I still have the stuffed-animal panda he gave me when I was five and the stuffed-animal dog he gave me on the last birthday we spent together. I’ve followed really closely in his footsteps without realizing it. We share a passion for journalism, music and technology.

I have a little nephew now, and it hurts that Bill won’t ever get to know him. Rather than dwelling on that, though, I have made it a goal to be to my young nephew half of what Bill was to me.

On Bill’s gravestone is engraved one of his common sayings: “I wish you success in all of your failures.” Though I haven’t been able to call him and complain about those failures, I always hear those words in the back of my head. They inspire me to succeed, and to move on from the hard times and not dwell in my mistakes. I wonder if he knew those would also be the words that have helped me heal.



(Photos left to right; top to bottom)

PHOTO (1) Illustrates the age difference between Bill and Priska... people would often think Bill was her Dad. PHOTO (2) The Neely family before Priska came along: Bill, Nicole and LaKisha. PHOTO (3) Bill and Priska. PHOTO (4) Bill and Priska

To this day, I have not met anyone else who has made me feel as special as Bill did. I wish I remembered more. I wish I’d known him longer, but I’m thankful that I had the chance to know him at all.

**PRISKA NEELY** is a native of Silver Spring, MD. She studied Broadcast Journalism and Linguistic Anthropology at New York University and now is an editorial assistant for NPR’s live call-in show, *Talk of the Nation*. She also enjoys singing and writing music.

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# max the happy caterpillar

a children's picture book by kathy archibald anderson

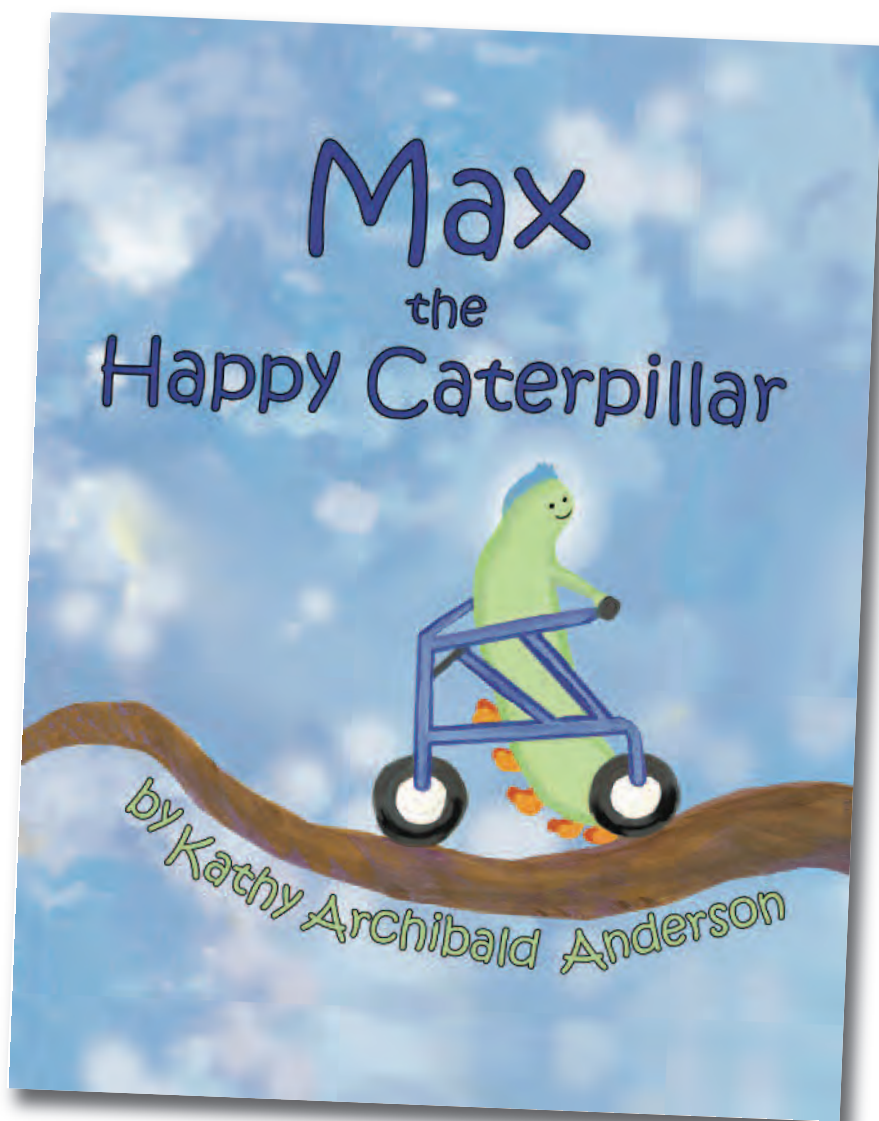
How do you explain death to a child? *Max the Happy Caterpillar* is a simple metaphor which engages the reader with little Max who, despite special challenges, is a very happy caterpillar. One day, when little Max doesn't feel well, his mom wraps him in a blanket she calls his cocoon. When it is discovered that Max is gone, everyone becomes sad. But Max is not really gone because Max the happy caterpillar has become Max the happy butterfly.

*Max the Happy Caterpillar* (Paperback)  
A Children's Picture Book  
8.5" x 11" paperback, 36 pages

The main subjects of this beautifully illustrated children's picture book are disability, death, and loss; yet the author makes this a happy story. Max the Caterpillar (based on a real boy, Max) is born with feet that are backwards, but that doesn't slow him down one bit. He's loved immensely by his family and friends. One day Max gets sick and is wrapped up in his cocoon. When his family discovers that he is gone, they cry for their loss. This is not the end of the story though. Using the metaphor of a magnificent butterfly coming to life out of the death of the caterpillar, the author focuses on the joy and freedom Max now experiences and the great love he will always have for his family.

For those who believe death is not the end but struggle to explain this to a child who might be dealing with the passing of a loved

one, this is a wonderful resource. The book is moving, but never overly sentimental. It is suitable for and can be enjoyed at any age. Younger children will love the pictures and identify with all the fun Max has with his family and friends. They'll be touched by the sorrow his family feels at his loss, but quickly be able to recognize how happy and beautiful Max the Butterfly is. Parents of older children will find this book can be a springboard for a deeper discussion and understanding of death and beyond.



You may order *Max the Happy Caterpillar* on the [griefHaven](http://griefHaven.com) website in the bookstore section. It is also available at Barnes & Noble, [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) and [Maxstorybook.com](http://Maxstorybook.com)



# the before and after... what does it mean?

by erica staab

What does it mean to lose a brother?

Ever since that fateful day I lost my brother, Mitchell Wayne Staab, at the age of 27, I have thought about what it truly means for me to lose my brother. Of course there is the grief and sorrow and pain of missing him, but what else am I missing as a result of my brother's death? I know that, as time goes on and I continue to experience all that Mitchell was to me in my everyday life, the answer to that question will grow. However, today this is what it means to me to have lost my brother.

It means the loss of a past, the loss of the stories we shared, the silliness that only siblings know. It means that there isn't that one person that, in spite of it all, is there for you. That fierce loyalty is unlike any other. You share DNA, you share experiences, you share your parents' love, and you share their stories. You also share birthdays, Christmases, jealousy, and laughter. You share life every day!

For the formative years of my life, Mitchell was my friend, my enemy, my confidante, and my "but do I have to?" playmate. He was in the birthday pictures with my friends all lined up around the cake that held seven candles and included cherubic faces with cute curls and wide grins. There he was, my annoying younger brother, who had to do everything I did. With his knobby knees that were always scraped and bandaged, with bruises galore, and a big goofy grin, there he was—always in the background of my life. He was always in the "picture," even when I wanted desperately to be rid of him. The backseat of the car feels smaller without him breathing my air or putting his finger the width of a hair away from me to annoy me.

As I looked back, I began to see him, in my mind's eye, like a slideshow: the first day of school, me and him, me completely unaware of how quickly we would part, the family vacations, the photos with the bad hairdos, the geeky clothes and the awkward grins, the "Just stand there and pretend like you like him" shots. The, "Mom, he is breathing my air!" The "Stop touching me" moments. The first boyfriend and that pesky brother who was always peeking to see if I was going to get the first kiss I was desperately waiting for (well, so

was he—equally so) so he could run back to Mom and Dad to tell them what just happened.

I lost that person—the one with whom I could reminisce and laugh and laugh until our stomachs hurt. Like when we put masking tape along the basement floor to equally split it in half so I had my side and he had his. Yet even with a line down the middle, we would somehow end up playing Monopoly where I was always the horse because I got to choose first. After all, I was the oldest. We could never agree on who would be the banker because he would cheat and I didn't like to do math. There we were, laughing with the pieces strewn around us. A rare moment of quiet for Mom, which included us creating dance shows with the neighbors to the Snap Crackle Pop record I got from

*"I have lost  
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different than mine."*

collecting Rice Krispies points. Then there was the secret hiding space we found where we would quickly unwrap Christmas presents and put the tape back just exactly the way it was so Mom and Dad wouldn't know. We had our private jokes that only we got, like the Arnold "Hey, hey, hey" and the "Are you my mother?" We had special late-night talks when everyone else was asleep. At first they started simply because he was the only one there, and then it began to change. Over time Mitchell became not just my annoying brother, but my brother, then a friend, and

soon a father.

Our grandmother, a wise woman who had seven boys and one girl, knew a little about sibling rivalry. There was one day we were so mad we couldn't stand each other, and she corralled us both into the kitchen and forced us to hold onto the broomstick until we made up. Within minutes we did, forgetting what was so horrible, giggling and playmates once more.

It hurts to watch other people who have relationships with their siblings. It hurts to hear people say the simplest things like, "Oh, I talked to my brother today," or to know that someone else is forced to the family function just like you except the major difference is that you don't have your brother there to laugh at Dad's funny socks or Mom's silly phrases—to share the look over the other things that only the two of you get. I just want him here to give one more hug to, to be able to tell him one more time that I love him, to hear his voice again, to have him say,



*Mitchell, friend of the family and Erica at her wedding.*

"I love you." To know that he is proud of how we are taking care of his daughter, Annabelle, who he helped name but was never able to see before he died. The family photo feels less vibrant, the supper table seems empty, the church pew somehow seems less full... everywhere I go it just feels like I am missing something.

And then there are Mom and Dad. Everyone tells me they are my responsibility now, and I

feel that I am too. After all, I am the only child left, so the pressure is now squarely on my shoulders to attend everything and do everything that Mitchell and I would have done before. I always think that I've learned how precious life is, and I simply can't imagine seeing that look on my parents' faces ever again—the depth of pain and the zombie-like motions of the first few months. It's those things I'm talking about—things I want to do, things I don't want to do, things I would choose to do regardless, but now I am the only one who has the responsibility, the burden, and the gift that is no longer shared.

There are the decisions that come regularly that I have to make. For instance, how do I respond when someone asks me if I have any siblings? I know that it is something that I will adjust to. Some days that question doesn't bother me at all, and some days I don't want to tell the story, and some days my eyes swell up with tears just at the very question. Someday perhaps I will be able to look at pictures and feel the warmth of the memories we shared, the life that we had together, but now I have a fifty-fifty chance that it will bring me to laughter or to tears.

I fear the loss of the memories I have now as well as the stories he remembered that I had forgotten. I have lost "his" version of our childhood, which was different than mine. We have lost his throwing his backpack in the house and bounding up the stairs and bursting into the bathroom after school. We have lost the future of him growing as a father, of him transitioning into taking care of our parents with me, and of the two of us worrying about things together; I worry alone.

We still have the love, though. We also have special memories, and we have the laughter—that can't be taken away, but sometimes it is darkened by the injustice of it all, by the desire that is so strong to just wrap my arms around Mitchell's lanky body just one more time, to come up to the side of him at a family function, put my arm around him, look up at his 6'7" frame and say, "Hey, little brother."

Sometimes there is this peace that comes—that feels like the sweatshirt that I have of his that can somehow wrap as close as he would have if he were here to hug me one last time. Or sometimes his eyes in a photo seem to look straight at me, and sometimes I can imagine what he would say if he were



(left) Erica at three years old with Mitchell.

(below) Nelson family



*My motto*  
for life is now this:  
  
Now go,  
create beauty,  
pass on kindness,  
cultivate gratefulness.  
Live a beautiful life.

I do it for Mitchell."

here. Yet, it is hard because there is so little left of him now: a life broken down into boxes, some thrown away, some given away, some kept, some cherished, some just things, and some that contain the very essence of him—items that trigger a memory or photos that capture his life—and yet they all fit in a box. I went from having a brother to sit next to at Thanksgiving and to buy presents for at Christmas, to a brother whose memory and

life fit into a box.

And I am still sorting through it all.

When it first happened, the first week in the midst of the shock, I knew that I could not begin to fathom what that truly meant to say, "He is gone." When would I truly begin to believe, or know that it is real, that it isn't a joke, that it isn't something that someone can wish away or make any different, that no matter how desperately Mom and Dad

wanted to make it different for me, and I for them, there was the reality? I still don't know. I know that it will mean different things to me as I watch Annabelle grow, as I watch my parents age, as I watch my own life move forward and do not have him at the milestones of life in a physical way. I am far enough away that I no longer fear that life won't move on; yet, sometimes that is also the problem—life moves on.

I don't feel like I fit with other people who have experienced grief. Losing a sibling is different. It isn't the loss of a child, as significant as that is. It isn't the loss of a spouse, although I have felt pieces of the pain. It isn't the loss of a grandparent, which is traumatic and hard, but somewhat expected and in the grand scheme of things. It isn't the loss of a parent that everyone at some point can relate to. I feel like there are so few who can understand what it means to go from being one of two siblings to an only child. And in just one moment—the moment that tears your life into two pieces—the before and after.

Even now in conversation, Mom and Dad will say, "No, it couldn't have been then, that was after Mitch died," and I just want to make them take it back every time I hear those words together. It is beginning to feel more real, and the loss is beginning to take shape. It no longer consumes my life in such a complete and total way. Yet not a day goes by that I am not reminded in some way, shape or form that that was before... and this is after.

My motto for life is now this:

Now go,  
create beauty,  
pass on kindness,  
cultivate gratefulness.  
Live a beautiful life.

I do it for Mitchell.

» To share with Erica, please contact her at [compassioninallthings@gmail.com](mailto:compassioninallthings@gmail.com)

# sibling grief

by revered susan moriarty

One Saturday morning in August of 2001, I went down to my office at the church to get another commentary for my sermon the next morning. It was there that I received a phone call from my Mom—Tom had been found dead in his home.

Tom was a builder and was all dressed and ready to go to work on a project at a friend's house. The coffee was full in the pot, and all he had left to do was put his boots on. Hearing the news was so unbelievable. I screamed, "NO, NOT TOM!"

I am one of the blessed people who is surrounded by close friends and thus did not have to experience this pain alone. Within minutes of getting to my home, I had a dozen close friends in my living room and someone who would drive my son and I home. The next two weeks are a blur, mixed with facing my parents, planning the memorial service, and all the other required tasks at the time of death. The emotions of grief came at me as waves of an ocean, sometimes bowling me over, receding and then returning, but more gently.

Tom's death was a complete shock to our family, and it is a loss that we all still feel daily. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't remember him, think about him, and miss him. Not that I haven't gone on and lived a full and often wonderfully rich life, but there is always that sense that a part of me is missing. Tom is the one who shared my genetics, my life history, our family stories, and the joys and frustrations of family life. There were those stories of growing up that would make us crack up until there were tears running down our faces, just with the "remember when..." and we both knew the story. You just had to be there. But there were also times of separation, and, unfortunately, when Tom died, we were in a period of separation. It is something I still regret and wish it had been different, but I was able to resolve for myself that I had made attempts to reconcile. After his death, I found the letter I had written to him expressing my love, and I realized that I wouldn't have changed anything in that letter and that I could let myself off the hook. He knew I loved him, and I knew he loved me, even though we never had that embrace that I still wish for.

When a family member dies, the emphasis is usually placed on the spouse, the parents or

the children, but the siblings are usually passed over... not intentionally, but nevertheless, they are. There are certain things said like, "Well, it's so good that you are there to help your parents," or, "How are his spouse and children doing?" But very few seem to acknowledge that the sibling is grieving as well. And they are often grieving just as strongly. Their grief is real and re-defining.

In my case, it meant an added responsibility in that I am now the only child of elderly parents, with my Mom having the beginning stages of dementia. Three years ago, I had both parents in the hospital at the same time during Christmas, and, at one time, in two different hospitals. Being that I am also a single Mom and a career woman presently serving as a hospice spiritual counselor, it was quite overwhelming. I would have shared that with my brother. At least he and I would have been a support system for each other. Now, when I think of my parents eventually dying, it is with the realization that my family of origin will be gone, and it will be me and my son left. It sometimes feels like abandonment, but other times it just feels so lonely. I have tried to think about it in more creative or positive ways, like Tom being on one side of life and me on the other. But in the day to day living, it is a sense that I once had someone to share this life with, and now he is gone. The platitudes like, "He's in a better place" don't comfort very often, even though I firmly believe in life after death.

Grief studies speak often about the grieving person needing to re-define who they are without that person. One of my supervisors speaks of grief as more than just the loss of the person, but also what that person symbolized for us. So, as we examine our emotions and process of grieving, we must look at not only the life of the person we lost, but the ways in



Tom and Susan

“Support needs to be given to siblings without the added pressure of taking care of the grieving parents... and without being told that it is now their responsibility to be what the deceased sibling used to be. That is a huge burden to put on a sibling who is also grieving.”

which we related to them and what role they played in our life: friend, shared interests, advisor, or someone we “took care of.”

What is important is to realize that siblings grieve as strongly as the others in the family and that they need to be given the same love, respect, and space to grieve and rebuild their lives. Just as each person grieves in their own way, each family member also grieves that loss of that relationship and the meaning it held for them.

Brenda Marshall, a grief specialist who lost her brother, discovered, as others have, that there is very little written material out there for sibling grief. Yet in my life alone, over the



last two years, I have had at least six friends who have lost a sibling. When we get together and talk, we discuss the enormous sense of responsibility we feel for the others in our families, and we have all experienced the utter lack of acknowledgement from others in our family and society in general as to the fact that we are in very deep mourning. And yet the sibling relationship is often one of the longest relationships in the family life together. Support needs to be given to siblings without the added pressure of taking care of the grieving parents, other children, and without being told that it is now their responsibility to be what the deceased sibling used to be. That is a huge burden to put on a sibling who is also grieving, yet it happens all of the time. Even though the feeling of setting aside our own grief in order to take care of the others in the family occurs often, it is also destructive and only prolongs the grief process for the sibling. Even though the sibling grief does get easier, it never goes away. Siblings eventually learn to live with the fact that their sibling has died. It is important for them to have the space and time to nurture their pain and find their ways of healing, while re-building life without their sibling.

Even though some believe that Elizabeth Kubler-Ross spoke of grief as a linear process—shock, denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and finally acceptance—the truth is that those were actually the various emotions a person went through who found out they were going to die, not the emotions a person goes through when grieving. And while I know these emotions are part of the grief process as well, the grief process is not a linear one, not everyone will necessarily experience all of those emotions, and most people find the process to be like a roller coaster ride, moving in and out of an array of different emotions and phases multiple times.

I have personally experienced grief as a time of movement from being orientated to being disoriented and back to being re-oriented again. With Tom's death came a time of disorientation because so much of how I defined myself had changed forever. I "was" a sister to one brother. I "was" one of two children in a family. Now I have no sibling, and I am an only child. So part of this grieving process for me over the last seven years has been one of re-orienting myself to who I am now, and what all the implications of Tom's absence means practically, as well as spiritually. It is a time of answering the often painful and difficult question, "Who am I now without Tom?" With that comes who I became because of him; this one person who shared my genetics and my history, my experiences, my joys, and my sorrows.

So who am I today? I am still a sister, a daughter, a mother, a friend, and a Pastor. And in the moments when I struggle with caring for elderly parents alone, I think how wonderful it will be for my parents when it is their time to go. They will have one child on this side of life and one on the other. I can hold their hand here, and Tom can take them by the hand and lead them to the Jesus they love and to their family members who have gone before.

One of the ways that Tom's death has changed me is in my work as a Hospice Spiritual Counselor. I regularly remind the families with whom I work to reconcile their differences now as much as possible before their loved ones die. I also do my best to not allow things to fester in my relationships and find reconciliation wherever possible. So who am I today? I am a sister, a daughter, a friend, a mother, a Pastor, a spiritual counselor, but I am also a reconciler.

» To share with Susan, please contact her at [revmother@att.net](mailto:revmother@att.net)

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## A Gaelic Blessing:

Deep peace of the running wave to you;  
Deep peace of the flowing air to you;  
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you;  
Deep peace of the shining stars to you;  
Deep peace of the gentle night to you;  
Moon and stars pour out their healing light to you;  
Deep peace to you, the light of the world to you,  
Deep peace to you.



# believe

a book by pattie welek hall

*Believe* is a story about the loss of a child... a heart's healing journey... and the bond of a mother's love.

Pattie Welek Hall is a mother, a writer, and an illustrator. Pattie resides in Charleston, S.C., with her dog, Emme, and is the proud mother of three wonderful children.

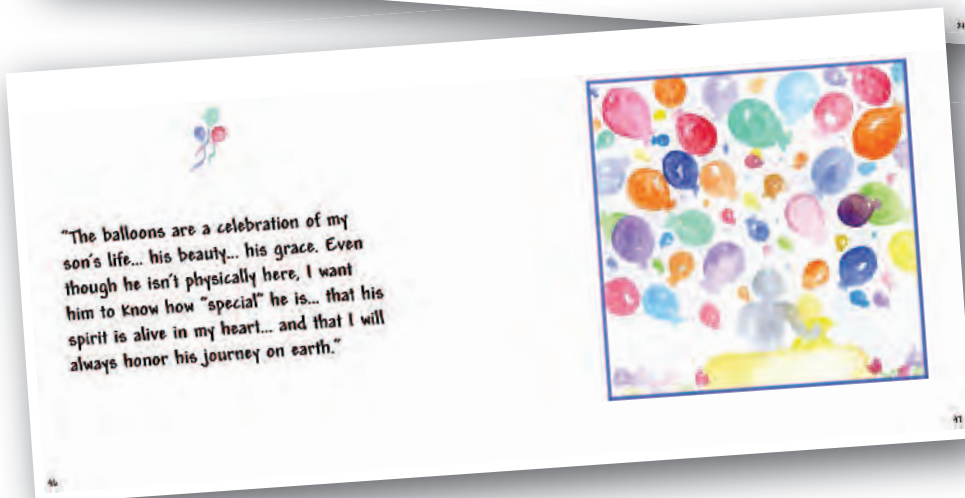
<http://pattiewelekhall.com>

To read the story about *Believe*, please refer to the April-June *Parent Journey* newsletter.



ABOVE: *Believe* book cover

LEFT: sample pages from *Believe*



You may order *Believe* on the griefHaven website or by contacting Pattie directly at <http://pattiewelekhall.com>

*Hey, siblings!* Remember to also read the *Parent Journey* newsletter so you can better understand what your parents are going through and how you can better support them.

we would love  
to hear from you!

Please contact us at griefHaven by email, letter or phone

We would love to hear from siblings of any age who want to contribute to future newsletters or parents whose siblings have expressed an interest in contribution. Here you can share your stories and let us honor your brothers and sisters while also helping so many others like you who will be forever grateful for the loving guidance and hope your stories will provide.

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*where hope resides*