

where brothers and sisters are heard

THE SIBLING



where hope resides

VOICE

july - sept 2011

gone, but not forgotten ...
two brothers and the
legacies they leave

by richard putney

Paul

It was roughly 3:00 A.M. I awoke from sleep and headed downstairs. My mother was in the kitchen and seemed upset. I asked what happened, and she told me she had just come home from the hospital. She told me that my oldest brother, Paul, had just died in a car accident.

The year was 1970. Paul and I were many years apart; I was 10, and Paul was in his twenties. When Mom told me Paul had died, I remember not feeling anything and just going numb. I think now it was due to our age difference and that Paul had already gone to college and was teaching. But I know this: he was the model older brother.

When I was growing up, Paul was the one who would take care of me and my two other siblings while Mom and Dad worked. Paul always did what my parents asked of him. He took really good care of us, which was a big job for someone his age.

Paul was also a lot of fun. I can remember him pulling my other brother, James, through the snow on a toboggan. James had a bone disorder that was extremely painful, what laymen call "dwarfism." Paul had to give James extra special attention. So, besides having to deal with his physical and emotional issues of pain and "dwarfism," James was further emotionally devastated and left without his special support when Paul died.

As with every family, there were sometimes



Paul Putney

disagreements among my siblings and me. Whenever I got into a severe disagreement with my older sister, Paul always came to my aid. Paul was always more than just a big brother, he was also my protector, and I felt safe when I was with him. One time when I should have listened to him but thought I knew better, we were playing a pickup baseball game. I was catching and was not wearing any protective gear. Paul said to me, "Richard, you should back up a bit." I thought I was fine and ignored his wise words. Sure enough, two pitches later it happened. The back swing of the bat made solid contact with my mouth!

Hello to everyone reading this *Sibling Voice*. We hope that you continue to see the benefits from reading a newsletter written by siblings, but for everyone to read. Both the *Parent Journey* and the *Sibling Voice* are so informative and meaningful that everyone impacted by the death of a child, whether personally or professionally, will learn how you can love and support each person in a given family.

We would like to see more stories, articles, photos, etc. in each newsletter by the younger children. If you are a sibling with a younger brother or sister, or as that child's parent, you can be the one who asks him or her to draw a picture or answer a specific question, such as "What do you love the most about ...?" or "Tell me a funny story about ...". Or make up your own question and ask them to draw a picture of the person. In other words, you could be the catalyst and writer who will end up helping so many other children and their parents.

Recently we met with a group of grieving teens and received their input as to how they felt we could make the *Sibling Voice* an even better newsletter. Those changes will be incorporated in the fourth quarter issue, so watch for it!

And PLEASE share this newsletter with all siblings everywhere who have not received it, reminding them to get on our mailing list for future editions.

We are always here for you ...

~ Susan Whitmore
founder & president



Some things I learned the hard way. But Paul had tried, as always, to be my protector.

I remember after Paul's funeral that my parents had a luncheon at the house. People would go up to my parents and offer their condolences, but nobody came over to me. I was just hanging around, numb. It was all so surreal.

As a family we would visit Paul's gravesite after church as part of our Sunday ritual. At that time, I did not have a problem going, but as I grew older, something began to change. It was after I had moved out on my own, some nine years later, that, whenever I visited Paul's gravesite, I would just break down and cry. It was so painful that, for the longest time, I had to stop going. This surprised me so much. I would think, "Why now?" I sometimes wondered if it was guilt for not having had stronger emotions when Paul first passed away, but that seemed unlikely. I did not know what was happening and was trying to make sense of it. When I spoke of it to my mother, she said that she should have talked to me more about Paul when he died.

James

My older brother James continued to deal with his physical issues concerning his bones. He had numerous operations to try and correct the problems, but his chronic pain continued. He learned that warm weather helped his condition. So when James was old enough, he moved to Los Angeles where the weather was always on the warm side.

James would come back to visit us once a year in July or August when the weather was warm enough. I always looked forward to my time with him. Then in 1999, I received a happy call. James was getting married and wanted me to be his best man! It was an honor and a privilege that I will always treasure. When James and Lin were married, James was so happy.

James and Lin continued to come out once a year to visit. Whenever they came, James would always visit Paul's gravesite and put fresh flowers on his grave. I would be holding back the tears so James and Lin would not see me cry. I had grown up in an atmosphere where men don't cry—I was taught it was a sign of weakness.

James and Lin came for their annual visit in July of 2007. As always, it was great to see and spend time with them. We even celebrated their eight-year anniversary, laughing and having a great time. Just one month later, when I was out to dinner with family, my cell phone rang,



James Putney

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so I excused myself from the table to take the call. It was Lin, sounding extremely distraught. She told me James had just died. I was in a state of disbelief. Just a month ago everything seemed fine. I knew James was always in discomfort due to the issues with his bones, but not enough to end his life. As I sat on one of the benches in the hallway, my two aunts came out. I told them that James had just died. We agreed to try to keep a strong front for the rest of the meal and that I would not tell my parents until we got home. That was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do in my entire life. How do you tell your parents that their

second son has died?

Standing in my parents' kitchen, I told them that I had to tell them something and said they should sit down. My mother asked me what was wrong. I tried to finish my statement that James had died, but my mother quickly interrupted, asking me if James had died. I said yes. I still had to tell my sister. We had to wait until she got home. It's so hard even recalling those scenarios and how everyone reacted. Perhaps they were so traumatic I tried to block them.

James' memorial services were to be held in Los Angeles, and I decided to attend. While I was in Los Angeles I stayed at the apartment James and Lin lived in. Lin is a very intuitive person, and very good at seeing what is bothering another person. She was a godsend to James and has been a godsend to me. Lin told me that for years she and James had been praying that I would release the grief I had been holding in for more than twenty years over Paul's death. That helped explain why I had such a difficult time going to Paul's gravesite all those years.

This time, as I attended various memorials for James, I let my tears freely flow for the first time. In the past, I was always able to control my tears when other people were around. But this time, I couldn't have stopped my tears even if I had tried ... and I didn't.

The last part of James' service included Lin talking about James and their marriage. As she spoke, I could feel the overwhelming love and respect they had for each other. Theirs had been a truly blessed marriage.

After Lin made it through her speech, the presiding minister asked the audience to give Lin a hand. That is when grief overtook Lin, and she broke down. I am normally a very reserved person and do not want to make any kind of scene, but though I did not know anyone at the service, I left my seat and hugged Lin. We stood there, in front of everyone, hugging and crying. It was not long before one hug between two people turned into a hundred-person group hug! The release of tears was everywhere, and the ability to freely show our emotions without fear of ridicule was truly empowering. I will always remember that moment and how it changed my approach to life forever.

When I returned to my hometown of Maine, I spoke with my sister about James. Because she was three years older, she was closer to James than I was. It wasn't until that talk that I realized the emotional devastation James had experienced over Paul's death. After

“Tell those you love
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Paul died, James had gone into a deep depression. He felt God should have taken *him* since he had so many health and physical complications, and it was Paul who was the picture of perfect health. James always felt that his physical condition was a burden on the family. Of course, that was not the case, as we all loved and cared for each other, regardless of our other limitations. If one of us needed more care than others, certainly that was not James' fault.

I found out so many things that James had accomplished in his life. He was not a person who would brag about his accomplishments. He had turned his life around after moving to Los Angeles. He received a bachelor's degree in biblical studies and then a master's degree from Fuller Theological Seminary. He was a board certified chaplain with the Association of Professional Chaplains. In 2007, he was named Healthcare Team Member of the year at U.C.L.A. Medical Center. He was named Alumni Person of the Year from his former high school. He was featured on numerous shows with awards for his work with patients at U.C.L.A.

One of the most inspiring things about James was his work with patients facing a terminal illness as the Head Chaplain at the U.C.L.A. Medical Center, Oncology Department. This is where he had probably his greatest impact. As a boy growing up, James detested hospitals because of all the operations he had to endure trying to get his bones to work correctly. In spite of that, and because of his overall compassion and caring for others, he

was able, in a hospital environment, to reach out, giving hope, inspiration, and love to those who were suffering as he was. He had a genuine empathy with these patients and what they were going through—and his patients could feel it. James was able to form a deep connection with all of his patients. Bravely, he was not shy about chastising a doctor he felt had not given his patients the respect they deserved.

Another thing I didn't know and found out about was James' connection to The Erika Whitmore Godwin Foundation and griefHaven and how he served as an advisor on their board. It was a pleasure meeting Susan and Wendell Whitmore, the founders. I watched their amazing video, *Portraits of Hope*, in which James is one of the specialists providing commentary. I decided to honor my brother and all he had accomplished by spreading the word about griefHaven to people grieving and in need of their services. In the same way that James was able to empathize with his patients because of what he was going through, I felt I could help others deal with their grief by telling them about griefHaven, and that doing so would also help me with my grief process. Something that I have worked to incorporate into my daily living is to consistently reach out to anyone I find who needs support in their grieving. The grief process can be such a lonely one, and if I can make even a small difference in someone's life, that means more than anything. And, yes, I have found that doing something to help others with their grief definitely helped me on my own journey.

The biggest regret I have concerning Paul and James is that I never opened up to them with my emotions. I wish I could give them both a never-ending hug and tell them how much they have always meant to me, how they have impacted my life, and how losing them has broken my heart. Having them in this world made it a better place, and I wish I had shared that with them. That is something that I highly recommend to others: don't wait—tell everyone how you feel

now! If you wait, it could be too late.

A few years ago my mother passed away. It was a struggle dealing with her death. But what I learned from griefHaven has helped ease the pain, not only of her death, but also of Paul's and James' deaths.

Recently, I attended an eight-week grief support group. At the last of the meetings, one of the participants began to cry as she was saying good-bye. As she began to apologize for starting to cry, I told her that there was no need to apologize. I told her that her tears were a sign of love for the person she was grieving for and that there was nothing wrong with letting her love show.

To all of you who have lost a sibling or anyone you deeply love, I would suggest that you keep their memory alive in whatever way feels best to you, but never apologize for crying whenever and wherever that happens. Tell those you love how you feel about them, don't let stress stay between you and those you love, and allow yourself to feel and express your emotions. All of those years that I held my emotions in didn't help me whatsoever. Rather, I can see now that all of that pain and sorrow just stayed there, piling up with each loss I had, waiting—waiting for me to open my heart and allow the tears to flow. And so I have ...



The Putney family (clockwise from top): Paul, Ann, James, Richard and mom, Marie Jeanne

live forever in a day

by amanda geisinger

The loss of someone special creates a rollercoaster of emotions that range differently for all people. Some days you feel angry, other days overwhelmingly sad, and every day you feel like no one could understand. I lost my sister, McKayla, four years ago, and though I present myself as relatively happy, there are days when I am barely hanging on, and it is all I can do just to smile. Do people even see through my mask? Though I seem strong and invincible, don't they know that I am just as breakable as others? Yes, my parents have a terrible time without their daughter, but how am I supposed to live without my best friend?

I break down in times when I try to imagine a future without my sister. A future where I get married, have kids—even in the imminent future ... graduate High school and go to college. All my life I have envisioned my sister there in those special times ... all those plans have been wiped away from me. I remember the day she left for her environmental camp in seventh grade. I was so excited for her to come back. I didn't know how I would make it through the three days without her. Little did I know that I would have to live my entire life without her.

It is happy memories that keep me going ... keep me happy. It's the idea that I am going to live this life to the fullest, both for her and for myself. Actor Peter Facinelli once said, "Live forever in a day," and this is what I strive to do. My sister means everything to me, and even though life without her is unbearably tough, I live on our happy memories together. My philosophy is to live this life with little regret. Never question whether you should have done something or not. Look lovingly at your past and confidently toward your future. Your life is precious, and even though we are sent debilitating storms, life can still be worthwhile and amazing.

Here are a poem and an essay I wrote two years after McKayla's death ...



McKayla and Amanda

Life Changed in A Flash

by amanda geisinger

We all take the things we love for granted
But suddenly the next day you feel stranded

Overcome with sadness

Filled with grief

Left to be

All alone

Cold and empty becomes your home

Life takes on a whole new meaning

Yesterday was good

Today you're bleeding

Days go by

When all you do is ask yourself why?

Seeking answers

With no reply

Your pain stays put

While life streaks past

Subtle distractions

Transparent mask

Novocain

by amanda geisinger

Awake. Birds. Crickets. Wind in the trees. I finally hear these things.

For two years I was asleep. Asleep, like the long shadows outside my cloudy house, where the sounds of laughter fell silent against the drenched walls. My senses were frozen: no taste, smell, feeling or noise could penetrate the safe, bulletproof wall I built around myself. My life had become a perpetual winter. Numbness was all I felt. Smells, like flowers blooming in the spring, freshly-cut grass in the summer, apple pie cooking in the oven in the fall, and the smell of the newly decorated Christmas tree in the winter, were lost. I would stare out the bleeding windows, into a grey sunlight. Every day was the same as the day before. I was on a train speeding blankly through a storm; everything outside the windows was a dark blur. I kept my head low, and dove forward into daily life, never

“Your life is precious, and even though we are sent debilitating storms,
life can still be worthwhile and amazing”

really understanding what was going on around me.

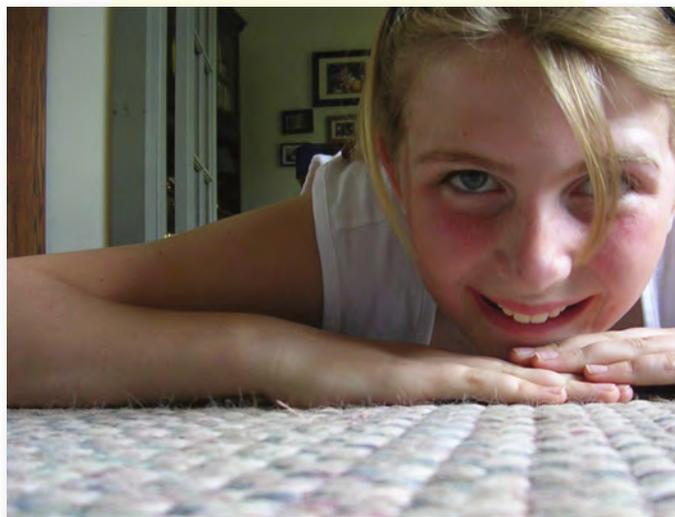
The storm lasted two years, and finally the sun breached the clouds. I no longer saw the flashing lights. I no longer heard the piercing sound of the heart monitor as her heart fell silent. I no longer felt the coldness of her skin and the rough hospital sheet. Instead, I began to see her smile. I saw the way her eyes would glow and widen when she smiled or laughed. I saw the look she made every time I hugged her spontaneously, rolling her eyes in a look of annoyance, but a smile appearing, erasing any of her unconvincing pretenses. I saw my sister. For the first time, I heard myself laugh. The curtains opened and allowed light and color to fill my life.

It took two years to realize that after every freeze there is a thaw, after every winter there is a spring, after every ending there is a beginning. I found the glue to piece my life back together. I realized that even though the puzzle that connected my sister and me together was broken, it could still work. A piece would always be missing, but the other half was capable of functioning and having fun. The grey shadows disappeared, and sunlight took its place. The occasional shadow would emerge, but I found ways to fight off the shadows and stay happy by keeping the warmth and light of the sun visible and strong. The numbness, like Novocain, wore off, and I was able to realize that even though this huge



Maureen, Amanda, McKayla and Gregory

“I also realized that even though she died, I still had an entire life to live. I decided to live this life for her. For both of us.”



McKayla

part of my life was missing, everything would be OK, and things would get better. I found hope and strength.

My sister's death has been painful, but also encouraging. I have transformed myself into a person I am proud of. I have found who I am, and much of this has to do with the growth I experienced after her death. I have developed a sense of self and confidence, none of which I had before my sister died. This change and self-realization, though, wasn't something that happened in a day. Slowly, I began to wake up. It could have been a number of events that spurred this change, whether it was excelling in school, getting my first horse, or re-inventing traditions we had halted after her death. I realized things would get better and everything would work out. I can't put a finger on what was the actual cause of this transformation. It happened gradually. I began to realize that there were plenty of things to look forward to, and it was possible to be happy and keep her in my heart. I also realized that even though she died, I still had an entire life to live. I decided to live this life for her. For the both of us. I will never have late night conversations under the covers with my sister, or sing incredibly ridiculous songs at the top of our lungs, but it will be these memories that carry me through life. No matter what happens in life, things will always work out. They may never be the same, but it will get better.

in one split second ...

by ilene gelbman

Terry was my older sister. She was someone I could always go to when I got into trouble. She never yelled at or lectured me. Terry was one of the nicest, sweetest people I have ever known.

Lisa was the middle child and acted more like my parent rather than my sister. She believed in right or wrong, and things were either black or white. Don't get me wrong, she was also always there for me, but if she were going to help me, it came with a lecture.

Bob was 16 when he came to live with us and was a foster child. I remember thinking I had the cutest brother ever. After he moved out, Bob would come and visit us, always bringing the coolest gifts.

These three people are my siblings. We were very close, even though I had moved away with my husband and three children. We talked on the phone daily and saw each other regularly. My two sisters would travel and do fun things, and I looked forward to the day, after my children were grown, when I would be able to join them instead of just seeing photos of their trips and hearing about them. In other words, I always thought there would be more time—plenty of time when we would fulfill that dream of mine.

Nothing really bad had ever happened to our family. Then one night I got a call that changed my life forever. My oldest sister, Terry, had died in her sleep. She was only 38 years old. It was like time stood still. That night I had to take medication to sleep. The next day it was as if I were in a bad dream or some kind of altered state—there, but not there. My husband had to follow me around the house because I could not seem to

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Ilene's sisters: Lisa (left) and Terry (above)

complete a single task. I loaded the washing machine but did not start it. I sat in front of the TV flipping through the channels, but did not watch anything. I didn't know what to do.

I felt I had to be strong around my children and not scare them by showing too much emotion. Yet it was truly my other sister, Lisa, who was the strongest of all. She took care of almost everything after Terry's death, including most of the funeral arrangements. Thank goodness for my pragmatic sister.

After Terry died, I thought about her all of the time. There wasn't a day that went by when I didn't think about her, miss her, and wish she were still here. I would ruminate over what I could have, should have, or would have done. Mostly, it was all of those things I wish I had done. This made the grief much harder and more painful. As I said, I always thought there was plenty of time for us to share our dreams later in life, and now this showed me that there is not always a "later." I vowed never to make that mistake again. And as the years moved forward, we all started to feel happiness again and made sure to spend as much time together as we could, regularly sharing by phone.

Lisa and I planned a family vacation that included all of our families. Everyone was excited, and we had a wonderful time on that trip. While we were vacationing, Lisa told me

that she had been having sharp pains and was planning to have her gall bladder removed when she returned home. I really thought nothing more of it. But two weeks later I received another dreaded call that forced me to my knees. Lisa said she had stage 4 colon cancer. She was more concerned about her seven-year-old son and who would take care of him than she was about anything else. I assured Lisa that I would take care of him for as long as needed. I told her that her focus should be on getting better, and I truly believed she would. I now had to tell my kids that their Aunt Lisa was sick and that I would be going to Miami for six weeks to help her. I had to be strong and did not want my kids to know how sick my sister really was until it was absolutely necessary.

Every telephone conversation Lisa and I had was about her cancer. There were times when I desperately wanted to talk about anything but her "stupid" cancer. I was so angry that this was happening to our family and often didn't believe it could possibly happen again. Thinking that way often gave me hope, because I would think that no one could possibly lose two siblings in one family ... could they? I would think, I am not supposed to have all this responsibility on me two times in my life. Yet, the unbelievable did happen again. Even when Lisa knew she was

dying, she never told me, because she didn't want to take hope away from me. That was Lisa, always the protector.

The call from Lisa's husband came in June. The voice on the other end was a quiet whisper as he said, "Ilene, if you want to see your sister before she dies, you better come now." I now had to tell my children that their Aunt Lisa was going to die. I had to be strong for them. I had to be strong for my brother-in-law, my mother, my father, and, most importantly, Lisa's son. I kept thinking, this is not happening. This is not happening!

My children were hit hard by losing Aunt Lisa, and the fact is that, in the end, they not only lost Aunt Lisa but also their uncle, for after Lisa's death, he cut all ties with us. Everyone was just so sad. I would go through the daily needs of life, but I was in a daze all of the time. I often wished I was anyone but me. As I boarded the plane to Miami, I kept thinking it was all just a horrible dream and that I would rather be anywhere right then than on my way to Miami for this reason. Throughout the plane ride I kept my face turned toward the window, gazing at the clouds and quietly crying and talking to my older sister, Terry. I felt so alone.

When I walked into Lisa's house, I was immediately immersed in a depth of sadness. You could feel the sadness everywhere. Others were there, yet all I could see was my sister lying in her special bed they had put up for her in her living room. My initial feeling was that I wanted to turn and run away. After all, Lisa was always the one who handled things like this, not me! Now she was the one who

needed me. Could I really do this? I had to. I wanted to . . . for Lisa. It was now my turn to give back.

The days lingered on, and Lisa's nurses handled the things I couldn't. I was concerned for her son and all that he was going through. Having to cook, clean, pick up, and be there for him was a good distraction from the challenges each day brought. And Lisa went through so many different emotions. Sometimes, when Lisa's husband returned home from work, I would leave to run an errand. These were times that were good for me, as I needed that break. During one of those times I was sitting at a red light looking over at the car next to me. There was a guy who had a Slurpee and was working really hard to get what seemed to be the last little bit out of that cup. I watched as he turned the cup upward and was banging it against his mouth. In that silly moment I thought, *I wish I were him right now with my only worry in the world being how I was going to get that last little bit of Slurpee out of that cup.* A part of me was tempted to let him know just how lucky he was.

The day Lisa passed was a rainy one. We were all there, loving her, just as we had all along. I stayed at Lisa's house another two months to take care of her husband and son. I had been through so much, had learned so much, and I longed to be with my own family now. It was time for me to go home.

The whole time I was at Lisa's, I was so busy trying to be brave for everyone else that, when I got home, everyone thought I was doing well. Fortunately, my husband knew differently. Thinking of Terry and Lisa started to take over my thoughts. Thinking of one would always immediately include thinking of the other. Lisa's death was very different than Terry's, since I was such an integral part of Lisa's. Of course, the pain I felt was the same, but the thoughts and images that played out in my head were different. It seemed every movie I watched and everyone I ran into who had siblings would just make me miserable. My husband finally told me that, as much as he would like to help me, he couldn't. He said I needed professional help. Exactly three visits later, I was given a piece of advice that probably saved me from sinking into a deep depression. The doctor told me that I was being consumed by my thoughts and that it was okay to think of my sisters.



The Gelbman family in 1995: (top row) Lisa, Ilene, and Terry (second row) Danny (third row) Erica and Christopher (fourth row) Douglas

But, he said, instead of allowing the thoughts to consume my every waking moment, I should set aside a specific time and a special place where every day I would think of them. I decided to try that. Every night before bed I gave myself as much time as I needed to think about Terry and Lisa, and did so until I fell asleep. Then I slowly decreased that time. It had initially taken me three years to stop thinking about Terry every day, and that was only because Lisa had gotten sick. After Lisa's death, it took six more years for me to finally learn to live with their deaths.

In March 2010, my foster brother, Bob, passed away. After Bob's death, I didn't really cry. I think death is just something I have learned to accept about life. So to honor Terry, Lisa, and Bob, I now try to live life like they would want me to. I know they would want me to be happy and embrace life. So I have taken a little piece of each of them and tried to use it in my everyday life: the way I think, the way I react, the way I make decisions, and the way I treat others.

People often comment about how I could still be standing after so many losses. Yet I know that, regardless of the tragedies life has thrown my way, it still goes on. We have choices to make, and I choose to live with the reality of all of their deaths and make my life as meaningful and good as possible. I know I will always have my moments where I miss them and want to share this or that with them, especially when I'm with my parents or at family events. I also know that I will never "get over" their death. However, I owe it to myself and my loved ones to take all that has happened and all that I have learned and integrate it into the life I have today and the kind of person I am in this world.

“So to honor

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from death do i part: how i freed myself from addiction

by amy lee coy; book review by wendell whitmore

an amazing story of healing, inspiration and hope

You may be surprised that griefHaven is recommending a book about one person's struggles with addiction, hopelessness, and feelings of failure. Yet, be patient with us because, as you read on, you will understand why you may, indeed, want to read this book.

After receiving this book, we, too, wondered how it might apply to our bereaved parents and siblings, other than those who have lost beloved children to the overwhelming powers of addiction. Upon reading this book, we quickly learned that Amy Lee Coy's story has absolutely everything to do with all our stories of loss and grief. So often, cross-over experiences take place with life's great struggles and tragedies, and Amy's story is one that crosses sweetly and gently onto the path of grief, loss, and hopelessness, and then back to the discovery of life's beauty and goodness.

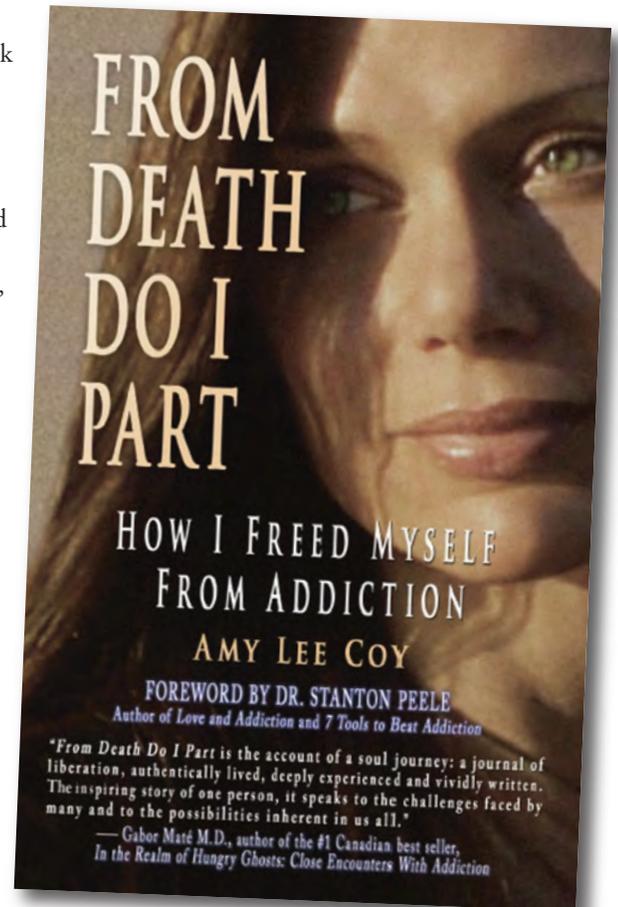
Is this book for you? We believe *From Death Do I Part* is for everyone. One board member told us that she began reading the book on Friday night and could not put it

“*S*adly, we parents too often continue to hold ourselves somehow accountable for our child's death, even though we know we did all we could given our understanding at the time.”

down until she finished it the next day morning. Obviously, Amy's book is an invaluable resource for those struggling with addiction. And it is equally invaluable for parents and siblings those family member died from substance abuse, and who need a deeper understanding and release from the guilt of the “what ifs.” But, beyond that, *From Death Do I Part* offers hope and inspiration to anyone lost in deep feelings of how “bad” life can be. That, of course, should just about cover all of us. And though Amy's wisdom in this book is timeless, her delivery of it is very “now.”

Amy writes with unusual clarity and candor. In saying that, we are not simply referring to the clarity of her prose and format. We are also referring to the psychologically clean way Amy describes her past troubles and struggles without engaging in blame of any sort, either the “me bad” self-abnegation blame or the “it's their fault” victimhood blame. Such clarity helps us gently enter right into a story where blame never raises its negative head.

The result is a book richly packed with both the wisdom of acceptance and the hope for change, two essential qualities for recovery from loss that are not always found together. But there is more than that. As Amy recounts her struggles and many failings, all of life is affirmed. It isn't that Amy forces an uplifting attitude or is a “sunshine pumper.” Rather, it is that she describes how, at her lowest moment of despair and hopelessness, her concern for others provided her with the “lift” she needed. Because we experience Amy's world so directly, we are able to learn for ourselves the lessons she learns without the need for blame. Sadly, we parents too often continue to hold ourselves somehow accountable for our child's death, even though we know we did all we could given our understanding at the time.



From Death Do I Part has thirty-four short chapters, each a pithy, wise reflection. And though each chapter stands alone as a complete reflection, many profound themes applying directly to bereaved parents, siblings or those caring for the bereaved, are drawn from the book as whole. Here are a few of those gems:

Listen to what the struggling person has to say about himself and how he understands what is troubling him. This point is too often easily dismissed, even by psychiatrists and professional helpers. Amy counsels that if we listen more actively and openly, it helps the one struggling to tap into their own inner wisdom. This advice applies, of course, to all who care for the bereaved. Wouldn't any of us relish the opportunity, at times, to be more fully heard by others?

Practice becoming the loving mother or father to that childlike part of you that is suffering. We have to be willing, when possible, to step into the role of being our own loving parent, nurturing ourselves and encouraging ourselves to heal. Between episodes of high grief, when we sometimes have less pain and more clarity, we can begin to engender patience, caring, and loving guidance within ourselves.

Cultivate the knowledge that, at the deepest depths of pain, you need not abandon hope. This understanding can help us continue on, especially when the “approved and official” ways of dealing with a problem do not work. In Amy’s case, it was repeated rehab and AA experiences that did not work. And what generally happens when this standard treatment does not work is that the so-called helpers subtly “blame” the victim for not allowing the treatment to help them. But for some, standard group approaches are not effective, and they instead need something more unique and individual. It is not that they are necessarily refusing to be helped; it is that they are “individual path” people, and the help they are being subjected to is not appropriate for them.

As bereaved parents and siblings, we must keep hope in sight, even in the depths of our pain. And we must feel free to follow our own path of grief, even when that does not match others’ patterns of grief or the expectations of people around us.

Experiment with alternative ways to heal yourself do anything and everything that seems intuitive or inspired. Sweating and trembling on her bedroom floor, seemingly a complete and utter failure in life and close to death, Amy resolved to find an alternative to the therapies, drugs, and treatments she had tried for years without success in order to help herself and others like herself who needed a different way. Our own intuitive wisdom can sometimes be our best resource for progressing and healing.

When you are ready, find a way to use your experience of suffering to help others. This key to unlocking meaning from suffering is what makes this book so ultimately uplifting. Amy discovered the great gift that comes from dedicating ourselves to helping others. And helping others does not need to be part of some grand organization or plan. As bereaved parents and siblings, we often

have small, individual opportunities to help others lost in pain and grief. In griefHaven support groups, we all give each other the perfect “pearls of wisdom” we so need. We can take all of our pain and suffering, the totality of our sense of failure, the immensity of our feelings of being lost and broken—we can take all of that experience and use it to help others more easily traverse the difficult, rocky path of grief, to help them know they are not alone nor “crazy” in the depths of their pain, to help them understand that it won’t always be this way and that there is “light” at the end of the tunnel—then we release the great power of hope, and love, and life.

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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 contributing. Here you can share your stories, honoring your brothers and sisters while helping many others who, like you, will be forever grateful for the guidance and hope your stories provide.



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