



where brothers and sisters are heard

THE SIBLING

Noice

october - december 2011

Slipping Reality: an extraordinary book

by Emily Beaver, 14 years old

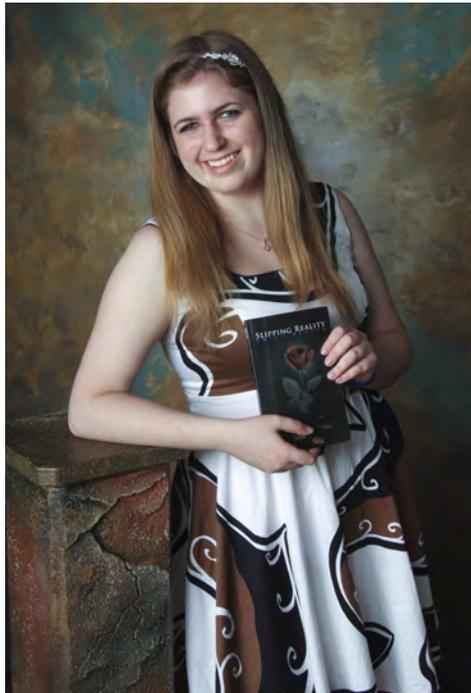
a book of love, loss and
fantasy for tweens, teens,
parents and all others

When Emily Beaver was only 14 years old, her brother, Matthew Beaver, who was also her best friend, died as she held his hand and stood by his side. Emily decided to use one of her gifts—writing—to honor her brother's life. So at only 14 years of age, Emily wrote her first novel. Here is her extraordinary story in her own words. But first, a quote about Emily's book, *Slipping Reality*, from David Tabatsky, co-author, *Chicken Soup for the Soul, The Cancer Book: 101 Stories of Courage, Support, and Love*:

"...art mirrors life to a great extent, and Emily Beaver does it as well as anyone. While few teenagers write full-length novels, *Slipping Reality* proves that adults are not the only authors capable of cutting so beautifully to the bone of a story.

I met Emily while editing "Cancer Cannot Cripple Love," her contribution to *The Cancer Book*, and as I got to know her better, I discovered that her story of love, loss, and fantasy, inspired by her own experience, was uncannily relevant for all of us, teens and adults alike.

Slipping Reality speaks especially to young readers searching for their own place in the world. Regardless of whether they have dealt with a loss of this magnitude, teenagers everywhere can



Emily Beaver

relate to the feeling of wanting to escape, to run away from their own adolescence, and to the struggle between the fairytale endings of childhood and the difficult truths of adulthood. For parents and others, it opens a window into the mind of a sensitive adolescent, struggling to deal with life's greatest trauma.

As Emily has struggled to repair her own broken world, she has potentially done a great service for so many others seeking comfort and inspiration. All that's left now is for those people to have the good fortune of reading this book. As

DON'T MISS:

- Hey! Be sure to enter the **Raffle For A Day at Universal Studios: Page 4**
- Use GoodSearch.com as your search engine—earn money for griefHaven: **Page 5**
- A new Question & Answer section JUST for siblings and answered by siblings: **Page 6**

Remember when your parents would tell you that you had to at least try a bite of that food that you were absolutely positive you were going to hate? And remember the times you tried it and actually liked it?

Working with you, grieving siblings, I have observed that you are always a gift to others because your wisdom and stories surrounding the deaths of your brothers and sisters are deeply impactful and helpful to so many.

One thing that we sometimes hear from siblings and want to address: not trying something "just because." For instance, a sibling might say he isn't going to read the newsletter or attend a grief group or talk about his sister, period. We would suggest that making that decision without trying it is like deciding you don't like that food because it looks different. How do you know until you try it? And that is our suggestion to you: try everything at least once so that you will receive the greatest amount of love, hope, and support available. Our experience? Siblings of all ages who are open to trying new types of support end up with closer and more meaningful relationships and are grateful they opened to the possibilities.



~ Susan Whitmore
founder & president

I try to help people heal through writing, I feel blessed to know Emily Beaver and her family. Now, it's your turn."

When I was younger I dreamed of being extraordinary, like my older brother, Matthew. Not because I wanted to be an outcast—I was already that, being so shy. I wanted to be extraordinary because my brother was extraordinary. And whatever he was, I wanted to be.

Matthew Beaver was, and is, my best friend. I love him to bits. When I was the shy girl at school who didn't know how to make friends, he made me feel included with him and the older kids. When we were at home, he would neglect socializing with peers in preference of hanging out with me. My friends were his friends; his friends were my friends. With his gentle encouragement and support I grew out of my shell, and it is to him I owe my confidence, my self-esteem, and my ability to step on a stage in front of hundreds and not give it a second thought. He gave me so many things without ever asking for anything in return.

It was while I was in sixth grade that he was diagnosed with cancer. It was ninth grade that he died. I was 14, he was 17, and I remember the moment so well. My Rabbi had just left when the hospice nurse called me in, telling me it was "time." I ran, wondering why I didn't doubt her this time. I had doubted her so often in the past because of all the false alarms. But the moment I saw him, with his eyes wide open and searching, his head turning back and forth, and his jaw falling slack...well, I'm pretty sure for anyone who was there that there would

have been no doubt.

I told Matthew I was there, and he opened his hand. I grabbed it and held on, the remnants of his pulse beating against my own. I did not cry; I only watched. Looking back, I crumble at the images I re-live of that time with my brother. Yet, in that moment, I felt so assured. Like I knew he was going home. In that moment I felt blessed, because thanks to my writing, I could be there next to him and watch him die. Is that a blessing? Getting to watch your best friend die? I would choose it over the alternative—missing it completely.

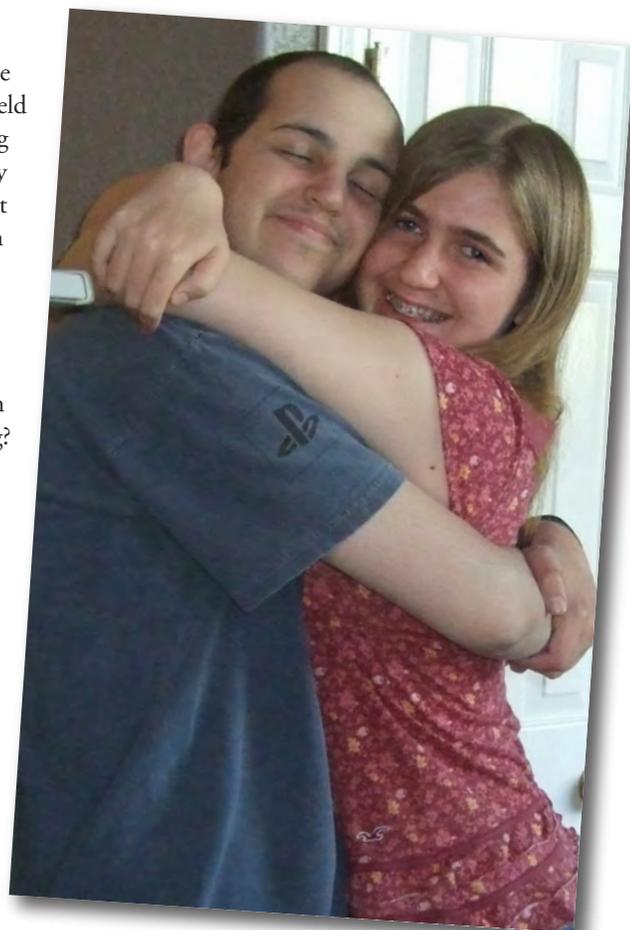
And my only saving grace was telling a story.

Not my story, mind you, though in a way it was. I wanted to tell the story I "couldn't" live, not the one I "did" live in that room watching Matthew die. Because if we removed the factor of my brother's life, we had a whole different story—the forgotten story, *The Sibling Story*.

It was in sixth grade that my life changed forever. It was in ninth grade that I wrote a book. And it wasn't that Matthew's story was not important—his was the most important of all. But that did not stop me, as a younger sibling, from feeling forgotten, from feeling left out and unimportant. Nobody ever asked how I was doing while he was ill. It was all about my parents, my grandparents, my brother...and with good reason, too, but I was also part of this tragedy. He was my best friend. He was the one thing I thought was a guarantee in my life, for my entire life. And that was taken away from me. And why nobody noticed was completely and utterly heartbreaking.

But I didn't write my book about that, although maybe one day I will. I wrote my book about the wrong way to say goodbye to my brother—the wrong way to cope with his inevitable death. I wanted a life where I could pretend it wasn't happening. But if I wanted that moment downstairs holding his hand, I would have to write my denial into a story. And so I did. From December 2009 to June 2010, I wrote my eventual debut novel, *Slipping Reality*.

I decided the story would not be about me; rather, it would be about a girl named Katelyn and her brother, Matthew. That way, I could honor Matthew through my writing,



Matthew and Emily, 2007

the most precious gift I had, but it was still a distance from who we really were. I let Katelyn be the unstable one. I gave her the emotional insecurities I didn't have the time to deal with, and I gave her the things I so wanted and even envied that she had: two (subconscious) guides to help her get to the place where she needed to be. The place where I had to be.

I value imagination more than I value any electronics. I wanted Katelyn to experience her grief through my most precious outlet—my imagination. So every day I'd go downstairs and do the impossible—watch my brother die—and then come upstairs and let Katelyn do the opposite. I let Katelyn close off. I let her be weak, so I could be strong. It's not an example of the "right" way to grieve. Not that there is a right way to grieve that I know of, but I certainly know that Katelyn's way was not the best or sane way if we're going to factor in the idea that you can't actually have guides come out of your subconscious and help you grieve.

But I digress. I didn't write this book to teach a lesson to potential readers. I wrote it to teach a lesson to myself. I needed to learn that staying strong was essential—not for myself, not for others, but for the bigger

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picture. And the bigger picture was this: I would never see my brother again. I would never get to kiss him, hug him, tell him I love him, ask him for dating advice, attend his wedding, meet his kids, or have him meet mine. What was once a guaranteed companionship was now a broken promise. And I couldn't miss that chance, that last opportunity, to kiss him, hug him, and tell him I loved him. So I let it be *Slipping Reality* that could do what I wanted, while I did the rational: swallowed my fears and let my brother hold my hand in those last moments of his life.

I wrote *Slipping Reality* three years ago, and after struggling to get it through the suffering book industry, I finally found a window of opportunity. Yes, I still have much to learn, not just about publishing, but about life. And three years later, I am now 17, the age Matthew was when he died. It pains me to know I will see ages he will never live. It pains me to sometimes forget what he sounds like, looks like, feels like. It pains me that that's life, and that as much as I can feel him through my writing, my acting, my singing, my joy, I can never again hold him and tell him just how much he means to me.

He was my big brother, and I loved him to bits. I still do and always will. And by honoring him through my writing, by honoring myself through my writing, I hope that people can look inside themselves and realize what's truly important, no matter their experiences in life.

I dreamed of being extraordinary when I was younger. I dreamed of being like my older brother. In humbler words, I am neither. But in my wildest dreams, I am. These things cannot be measured as proven fact, but regardless, I remember that shy little girl who dreamed of being a writer, and I know that, regardless of my talent, my age, my experiences, and my loss, that whatever I choose to do, it *shall* be extraordinary.

Emily Beaver lives in San Diego, California with her parents.

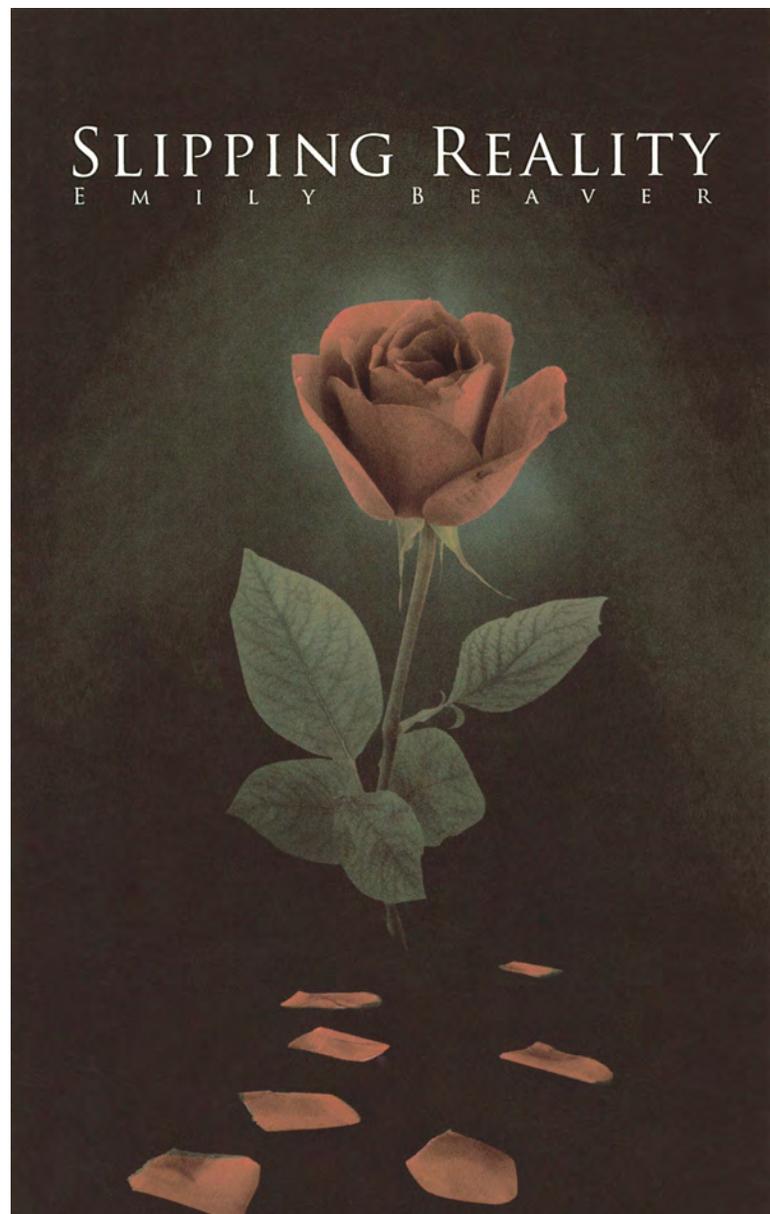
Order *Slipping Reality* at www.griefHaven.org, through Amazon, or at Barnes & Noble. You can get in touch with Emily at emilyb@cox.net.

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not the one I ‘did’ live...I decided the story would

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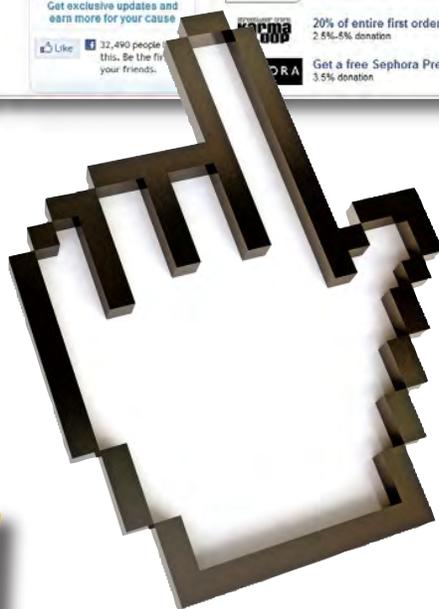
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siblings ask; siblings answer



THIS IS A NEW SECTION WE WILL BRING TO EVERY SIBLING VOICE NEWSLETTER. IT IS A Q&A WHERE SIBLINGS OF ANY AGE CAN ASK OUR SPECIAL “GRIEFHAVEN SIBLING GROUP” A QUESTION AND RECEIVE AN ANSWER FROM THOSE SIBLINGS. HERE IS OUR FIRST QUESTION BROUGHT TO US BY SOMEONE WHO WAS RETURNING TO COLLEGE THIS MONTH AFTER HAVING LOST HER BROTHER IN JUNE.

Q: “We lost our brother in June of this year. How should I handle telling others about the death of my brother when I return to college? And what about my younger sister who is entering high school?”

A: We are sorry to hear about your brother and know the difficulties you face. This is a tricky area because, ultimately, there is no surefire way for you to know if sharing your loss will enhance or hurt your relationship. It’s sad to admit that it could ever hurt a relationship with someone just because you share about your loss, but it does happen. One time, one of us shared with her college roommate about her brother, and from that point forward, the roommate was aloof and the relationship soured. On the other hand, there were times we told someone, and it only made things better, even leading us to know others who had also lost a brother or sister.

Because everyone grieves differently, part of what we recommend depends upon your personality. Some people like to share openly with everyone about their siblings’ deaths, and others like to keep it private until they trust that the person with whom they are sharing will be kind-hearted and compassionate about it. But for sure no one likes to share something so painful and

receive a blank stare or even find that the relationship sours because of it.

Here’s the deal: if you aren’t comfortable with a particular person or aren’t sure how the person will react, then hold off for a little while. If you follow your intuition, taking your time until it seems right or until you simply want to tell, regardless of their reaction, then you will most likely be on solid ground. Also, if someone says something to you that is hurtful—and they sometimes will—it’s okay to let the person know it was hurtful, or at least let the person know it

wasn’t helpful, but do so in a nice way.

One thing we recommend is not completely avoiding talking about your brother because then you may become isolated and feel too much alone. Plus, you might be surprised how many others there are on campus just like you who have also lost a brother or sister (or know someone who did) and who are looking for a friend to trust.

Good luck. Just remember that, although you may sometimes feel as if no one understands or “gets where you are,” many of us do.



{ To ask the griefHaven siblings your questions,
please email them to hope@griefHaven.org }

Hey, siblings! Regardless of whether you are 5 or 85, if you have lost a brother or sister, we want to share your story of loss and hope and how you have made your grief journey so far.



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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where hope resides

Parents of younger children: we need your pictures, stories, poems, sayings, or whatever your younger child would like to share!