

HOSPICE *of the* VALLEY
Bereavement Literature

WHEN A SIBLING DIES

Being a teenager is hard enough, but add to that the death of a brother and imagine the pain.

I was 16 years old when my brother, Guy, died in an automobile accident. A sophomore in high school, I didn't have many friends, and I just wanted to quit.

My brother had explained to me the importance of education, and he listened to me. He cared about me, and he helped me through the tough times at school. I felt comfortable with and close to my brother. I loved him, and I trusted him.

In an instant all this was gone. I didn't know what to do, where to go, who to turn to. I went to school to pick up the schoolwork I would miss. I was met in the parking lot by the vice-principal, who asked me, "Why weren't you in school yesterday?"

I said, "My brother died."

He said, "Oh" and walked away.

I went to see all eight of my teachers, and only one asked how I was. None of my teachers or classmates came to the wake. No one sent me a sympathy card. I felt lost, empty, sad, unimportant and scared. Why didn't anyone ask me how I was? Didn't they care? I needed to talk, to cry, to yell, something . . .

Without Guy, I wasn't sure I was going to make it. The house was full of people all trying to do and say the "right" things. I didn't cry, I just went on automatic. I kept hearing people say how wonderful Guy was and how Mom and Dad loved and missed him. I missed him, too.

One woman said to my mother, "Too bad it had to be your only son." I felt that it should have been me, not Guy. I didn't feel that I was important to my parents.

Naturally, people were praising Guy, but I, in my insecurity, got sick of hearing how wonderful he was. I entered into general conversation about Guy and his death with my sisters and parents, never revealing the contents of my heart. At the same time, I knew I had lost my hero, too. Inside myself I experienced a crying need for attention, and the one who would have been most sensitive to it was dead. I carried this unexpressed hurt, anger, grief and tears for eight long years.

I thought I had to be strong for them. I so wanted to keep my brother's identity alive that I assumed many of his functions in the household. I hoped that the wonderful things thought of him and said of him would somehow be said and thought of me. I also thought that if I did what he did *taking out the garbage, mowing the lawn, helping my father*

I would keep Guy alive for all of us.

Finally, after eight years of bottling up all these feelings, a special friend came into my life and listened to me. I was allowed to yell, scream, cry, journal and tell all the events over and over again, to uncap it all and tell my story. All of this was necessary for my self-worth to emerge.

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Today I have come to accept my brother's death and talk about it freely with cherished memories. I go to a support group. Even 20 years later, I share feelings; I've come to recognize that there are many hurting people like myself. I've learned to be a listener and a friend. I'm not an expert, but I've been hurt by death, and I will use this hurt to reach out to others who need help through mourning.

- Jeannette Beretta, BS, RN, in HopeLine: A Monthly Publication of HOPE for Bereaved, October 2004.