

## Loosing the Loss A Reflection on Life

What I offer to you is a story of an ordinary person, living an ordinary life, and who has survived uncommon sorrows and losses during a lifetime. This short story is not intended to illicit sympathy, but to offer perspective and possibilities in the light of some of the deepest loss that a child and mother can endure.

Looking back on my childhood I will say I was blessed. I am fourth in the family birth order which netted me the title of "The Baby". A benefit of being "the baby" is that you are always taken care of and sheltered from hunger, cold and the unpleasant elements of life. I was surrounded by goodness and love. To this day my childhood memories bring me joy and contentment.

At 14, my world of skiing, school and girlfriends was shattered. I had plans to go to "the mall" to shop with my friends, instead the school notified me that Mom would pick me up after school. I was annoyed that my plans were preempted, but didn't have a clue that my life was about to change for ever. I sat down in the front seat of the car; the mood, the silence, and the look on Mom's face were evidence that something was wrong. I don't recall the exact words; who cares anyway, because the message was that Dad was dead.

I recall retreating to my room. I was afraid. I did not know why Dad died and I was afraid to ask. I don't know who told me, but the words ring loud in my head, "Dad committed suicide." Oh God, why? What will I tell my friends? What did I do? Why didn't I call him? What was wrong? I was embarrassed. I wanted to run and hide. What was I going to do? Should I go to school or stay home? I realized if I just kept on with business as usual, maybe nobody would know and my feelings would go away. I put on a tough exterior and told Mom I wanted to go to school the next day; I would act like nothing ever happened. I was lost in a world of confusion and denial. Although surrounded by family and friends I was consumed by the unexplainable and twisted teenage emotions of death.

What would you do if you were standing in the hallway at work and a colleague approached you with these solemn words? - - your daughter has suffocated. In a blink of an eye my world fell into darkness, anger and disbelief. How could this be? What did the babysitter do that ended the life of my sweet little girl? I felt alone in an office full of people. I wanted to hide and I wanted a hug. I wanted my husband, but most of all I wanted my daughter in my arms.

It took an hour to reach my husband. He was in a similar state of panic, sorrow, and disbelief. When I finally reached him on the phone I asked, "What happened? Why did our daughter suffocate?" His response took my breath away. He slowly uttered words that took me to a level lower than the pits of hell, he said "It wasn't Jamie, it was Hillary." Within one hour I was told my 2 year old died and then the truth that it was our 3 month

old daughter had just died of Sudden Infant Death. I stood alone consumed with sadness and a feeling of loss.

Waking up to an empty cradle is hell. The sheets, her clothes and the air smelled like the warmth of a sweet baby girl. Where was she? I did not know. What had happened? I did not know. What was I going to do? I did not know. There was silence, there were tears. Well meaning friends said the passing of time would take away my sadness. To hell with time; I did not want to lose the touch, the smell nor the sight of that sweet girl.

Experience is what you get when you don't get what you want. Life has a crazy way of teaching us about who we are, what we are capable of living with (or without), and compassion for other human beings. I know now that my life experiences, both the joys and tears have helped me become who I am today. I don't know if I would have had the courage or unique understanding to help others in distress without my experiences of losing a father and a daughter. Could I have talked a young man who lost his will to live down from the railing of a bridge? Could I have related to his despair? Could I have helped him understand there is life after sorrow? Maybe not. Could I have looked another Mother in the eyes and told her I understand her fear, her anger, and her sadness as she stood looking at her son lying peacefully in his casket? Could I have simply told my best friend I love her when I learned her husband just took his own life?

When you lose don't lose the lesson. Life for me is about snatching victory from the jaws of defeat. I hate that I have had people that I love taken from me. I did not have a Dad to walk me down the aisle when I got married. I did not get to see my daughter turn 16 or 21. But in spite of these experiences I have chosen to lose the feeling of loss and go on with life. I have chosen to become a better person. I have chosen to reach out and help others who have had to learn the same lesson – the lesson of learning to lose "the loss".