

## My Brother Paul

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I'm writing a special story today about my brother Paul. This Friday, September 19, 2008 will mark 19 years since his death at the age of 27. My brother was my best friend though at 16 months apart in age, we argued like cats and dogs when we were young. When we became adults, we found a new appreciation for one another and we talked almost every day.

There were many things that drew my brother and I close, but the one that bonded us the most was that our dad was very emotionally unstable. My Dad was always fun loving and almost childlike in many ways, but his life was based upon lies and a self centeredness that had a terrible impact on our family. I now understand that my dad was clinically narcissistic and Bi Polar. Disorders that he has never been treated for.

In my younger years, our father's occupation was in church work. He acted as an associate pastor, youth pastor, singles minister and even a headmaster at a Christian school. It's hard to describe what our dad's influence meant in our lives. Our spiritual damage was so deep we didn't even see it. Sadly, I learned too late the terrible emotional effect on my brother.

Though our dad was very religious, he was often suicidal and my brother and I spent a lot of time rescuing him. We were so used to our dad and his antics, that my brother and I actually made light of who's "turn" it was to go deal with our dad. I only realized after becoming a mom, just how awful it was for two children to be in the position we were in. We never really believed our dad would hurt himself, but he talked about suicide calling it the "ultimate act of Faith". He glamorized it and in our early years even talked of our whole family dying together.

After 21 years of marriage, my dad and mom were divorced. At the time of their divorce, I was 18 and Paul was 19. Since that time, my dad has been married many more times and had more women in and out of his life than I can count. I was such a daddies girl growing up so, when my parents split, it was a shock for me that he immediately moved in with another woman. My brother wasn't as naive and charmed by dad as I was. In fact, it turned out that Paul had been aware of my dad's indiscretions for many years. My dad told me later that he couldn't think of a time during his marriage to my mom that he was faithful. He had so many affairs, he couldn't even tell me how many but was sure it was more than 100.

My brother was older than me by 1 year and 4 months. When we were young, I thought we were twins until he got to go to school and I didn't. He had carrot top red hair and freckles. As a toddler, he was a brut! I on the other hand was scrawny and fussy all the time so it didn't take long to learn how to get him in trouble!

My brother and I were as different as night and day. Paul was a perfect student and all his teachers loved him. I was the class clown with a lot of uncool teachers who often called my mom! Though he had a hilarious sense of humor, he was quiet and unassuming until he got to know you. I, on the other hand, never met a stranger and was never short on slapstick or words! One of our mutual joys was music, though we experienced it differently. My brother loved jazz and the symphony while I was a barefooted, rock n roll, party girl. My brother played virtually any instrument he wanted to play. From Bassoon, Piano and Trumpet to Violin and anything percussion! He could play any song he heard once on the piano or drums and I had a pretty good voice back then so we were our own band! Donnie and Marie had *nothing* on us!

At the age of 20, my brother got married to Melissa. Having been friends in High School, they ran into one another a year after graduation and began dating. After they married, they bought a small home and in time they had a daughter, Rachel. Rachel came through the process of artificial insemination though my brother would tell you that she was his miracle. He believed she was his biological child because of her blood type. He once told me her type matched his and not the donor. He had refused any tests to verify paternity but instead claimed her as a miracle. You see, a few years before Rachel, it had been determined that my brother's chances of fathering a child were almost impossible. It was a crushing blow to Paul but he loved his sweet Rachel and was thrilled when she was born.

On September 19, 1989 my life changed forever. My brother Paul, made a decision to end his own life. He came home at an odd time on a work day when he knew the house would be empty. He took out a concordance that had belonged to my Grandfather, whom he adored, and over text under the topic of LOVE, he wrote his last goodbye. Then he disconnected the garage door opener, and in keeping with my dad's preferred method of suicide, laid down under the back tailpipe of his car and went to sleep forever!

While so much of that time in my life is a fog it is also oddly vivid. As I write his story, memories of screams, hysteria, shock and disbelief still come back with clarity. I can still hear the sounds and feel the emotions. It was the most excruciating loss I've ever experienced and one that rocked my entire family.

After Paul's death, I experienced the feelings of failure, loneliness, sadness, depression, hopelessness and anger at God. In fact some days I experienced all of those feelings and more all at one time! It took a long time to find joy again but I found it! I am blessed to say that today, though I still miss him terribly, I know that God has used his life and his death in an amazing way.

Ten years ago, when I experienced a seminar like the Boot Camp, I was forever changed. In fact, upon completing that program, I decided to become a part of it. From that seminar until launching the Boot Camp with Jim and David years later, I have never abandoned the one thing I know that gave me back my life. I love the blessing I now have of helping others. Many people suffering like my brother have turned their lives around after hearing his story. I learned that if I gave my brother's story to others who needed it, his death would have meaning! Isn't that the coolest! If I give my pain away, I am blessed for it?

Well in my wrap up, I should tell you that my father, was incarcerated almost 10 years ago for attempted murder. His romantic escapades resulted in a jealous shootout that almost cost several people their lives. My father and I remained close for many of those years but sadly, his illness and incarceration created in him a person I could no longer have a relationship with. Because of his mental illness and the consequences of his actions, my dad's instability is at an all time high. He's simply become too angry and too dangerous to associate with. Though it breaks my heart and I miss him terribly, I know I had to let my dad go. In less than a year, he will be released from prison and it is not my intention to reestablish a relationship with him.

My sister-in-law, Melissa remains a close part of my family. My niece Rachel is now an adult and wants to become a paramedic. My mom remarried in 1982, the most wonderful man I could have ever hoped to have as a Step dad. She and Art are also a regular part of the Boot Camp with me. Life is not the same without Paul. Even after all these years, I occasionally get the urge to pick up the phone and tell him something. I long to tell him about my life, my husband, kids and my business. I know my big brother would be proud, though I still wish he'd

realized that all the pain he was feeling wasn't forever. I've often joked about punching Paul's lights out when we are reunited in Heaven but in my heart, I long to embrace him again! Until then, I will continue to share Paul's story with the people I encounter that might benefit from knowing that they're not alone.

I have watched people change their course when hearing about Paul's life, death and legacy! God has a purpose for everything and of that I am 100% certain. At times we all suffer the excruciating blows of life, but I've learned and I hope you will take from this story that when you give your struggles to God in an effort to help other people, you too will be blessed! Paul is missed to this day but he is never far from my heart or mind. To my last breath, I will ensure his legacy is not one of a sad ending but one of life and hope!

You can see more photos of my brother and I on this article page on my website.