



I Was Spared; He Was Not. *How Will I Ever Move On?*

by a NAMI Suicide Survivor

For most of his life, I didn't know him, at least not in ways I could articulate. But I knew, even so. Somewhere out there, I had a family, and I probably had siblings. As I later confirmed, they were never told about the sister who they never knew existed. Even so, just as I had a sense as impossible to deny as it was to explain, Josh knew he had a sister. In fact, he was only 5 when he told my biological parents of his longing to meet the sister he felt a connection to, a long-lost sister he believed he had been separated from at birth. If nothing else, his intuitive knowledge that we had, indeed, been separated at birth, is compelling testament to the strength of the sibling bond. That bond, once so strong, was shattered the day I learned the awful truth: I was spared, but he was not. He left this world more than six months

ago, and in doing so, he took with him a part of my heart, and for that, I'll never know the peace I once enjoyed. Joshua, I miss you so much, and I'm sorry you didn't have the same opportunities I was given. I am sorry you were raised by those who wanted and wished you dead. I'm sorry I could not protect you; I would have tried. Rest in peace; I can only hope that in death, you find that which proved so painfully elusive here on earth.

Until I was an adult, I never knew the names of those who gave birth to me, but I knew that my teenage mom's drug use during pregnancy, along with her mental illness, resulted in my having been removed by order of the court. After my biological parents were deemed unfit, their rights forever severed, I was offered the

chance to be raised in an environment of stability, and of limitless love. Whereas Josh was every bit as deserving of such basic human rights, they were so unfairly denied him. Upon learning that I had not been spared the burdens of a mental illness that has ravaged the lives of nearly every single blood relative, my parents stopped at nothing to offer me the best help available. In stark contrast, however, Josh was raised in much the opposite way; in fact, they encouraged him to act on the desire to take his own life, even going so far as to hand him the means while suggesting that "he do the world a favor by pulling the trigger."

In adulthood, we were reunited and soon came to discover that we shared a unique bond that was precious, indescribable, and was born of

mutual adversity and hardship. He confided in me about his addiction and his mental illness, expressing relief to have found someone who, for the first time in his life, did not judge and did not attempt to make right those things which were so inexcusably wrong. In time, we were able to talk with one another about the impact of having been born to a woman who valued meth far more than motherhood. Suffice it to say, it was a gift to know that I need not suffer in silence any longer, having found a person who truly understood.

With the passage of time, I couldn't help but to think about the countless ways in which I had been rescued from a situation that he was not so fortunate to have escaped. Why, I had to ask myself, did the state intervene on my behalf, yet two years later, he slipped under the radar, fell through the cracks, and he never had a chance to know the devotion of parents who valued and supported him. The question of why some people are born into the unthinkable, while others are blessed beyond measure, is a universal theme; in my case, it was deeply personal, as well, and it continues to haunt me. Though it is disturbing to think back upon, I can't recall how many times, after meeting my biological family, I turned to those who raised me and said the following "I'm so grateful for both of you. If I'd been raised as Josh was, I doubt that I'd be alive. I would have chosen otherwise. I would have done years ago." Such a statement would later prove to be eerily predictive of what was to follow; so sad, indeed.

The day that Josh left this world, most people carried on with

their lives, totally oblivious to the fact that the world has ceased to spin on its axis, unaware that everything which previously made sense no longer does. Josh's death did not only shatter the lives of all those who loved him, and still do; rather, his death has touched every one of us. The people who needed, and who still need, the encouragement and loved that only he could have offered in the ways that he did, and who could have benefited of the chance to know him, so also are they victims whose lives will never be the same. I've tried (to no avail) in the six months that have passed to make sense of his death; in doing so, I have more questions than I do answers, more confusion than clarity, and a greater understanding of the fact that there is no sense to be found in the senselessness of suicide and suffering.

Perhaps in much the same way as those who will forever carry the guilt of having survived tragedies that, if not for mere coincidence, they would otherwise have lost their lives to, I cannot help but to ask myself why. Why was I spared, and he was not? In leaving this world, he left behind a newlywed wife, and a newborn daughter who will never have any knowledge of who her dad was. Rather, she will only know him by the tragic circumstances of his final days and hours, which is a tragedy unto its own. To those who knew Josh in the ways I did, it is an absolute insult to suggest that his entire life can be fairly described by the unfortunate way in which he died.

In closing, I take strong exception with those who label Josh a "suicide victim." Josh was a fighter, he was not a victim. Josh fought a good fight until he had nothing left to give,

but as all of us who've found our way to this site have come to realize, the people who must face the daily hardships and heartaches of mental illness are to be commended; in every sense of the word, they are heroes, for they display incomprehensible courage in the face of burdens which most would crush beneath. Josh, you are not only a hero, but you are my hero, as well. If any of you had been given the chance have met him, I'm sure you'd agree that Josh was amazing. Josh was a devoted husband, an incredible dad, a wonderful brother who always described the opportunity to find his long-lost sister as a gift which, in his words, was "a dream come true." Josh was the type of friend, and the type of person, who willingly sacrificed his time, his sleep, and his safety in order to help those who struggled with many of the same challenges that he, himself, was never able to fully resolve. I only wish, in looking back, that someone would have picked up the phone during *his* hour of need. Josh was a person who brought to this world an amazing light; to that extent, there's now a dark void in this world, and in my heart, that will never shine as bright as before. His light brought comfort to those who he devoted his life to helping; without his support and encouragement, they would have remained trapped in the darkness of addiction and mental illness. May we all learn from his example, from the strength of character and the gentleness of spirit that he offered to this world and to the many people who he dedicated his life to helping. Josh, though you are dearly missed, you are most fondly remembered. I love you, little brother.