

SILENT SIBLINGS

He was sick. I'd known it for a long time. But the phone call on March 27, 2009 telling me my brother Steve had taken his life, came as a parallelizing shock. Even nine months later, I'm still numb to the reality of life without my big brother.

Steven John Moran was born on March 18, 1962. While not clinically diagnosed, it's now clear he suffered from depression, bi-polar and quite possibly paranoid schizophrenia. Steven was a great brother, son, uncle and person. He looked out for me when I was younger and was truly the most thoughtful, caring, giving, creative, friendly guy you could ever meet.

Since my brother passed, I have come to find out that everyone that has lost a loved one to a mental illness all shared the same characteristics as Steven. They were all hyper sensitive, creative, intuitive, kind, giving people. Many also wrote letters that are apologetic for being so difficult. They never wanted to be a burden, but the illness prevented them from living stable each day.

As a sibling, I feel we often are forgotten or ignored as to the affect the loss has had on us. I've noticed friends will ask how my parents are doing and not even ask how I'm dealing with the death of my brother. Yet, as a sister, I spent 44 years with my brother, my entire life! I sat next to him on the long family road trips cross country, I went to school with him everyday, I went to his swim meets, graduations. We shared at least 2 meals a day everyday until we all went off to college. Yet, friends of my parents and my peers stare at me and say how hard this must be for my parents.

As a sister or brother, our love for our siblings runs a different path than our parents. We do not share the responsibility for raising a child or nurturing their development, rather our responsibility is for caring about their well being and celebrating in their achievements and milestones. I was not my brother's keeper, but I was his biggest fan, a soft shoulder of comfort and pleasantly surprised at how he could make the ordinary seem truly extraordinary. I loved my brother, not the same way I love my parents. I loved him as a sibling.

My brother came to visit my family and me just before the Christmas holiday last year. With the strong seasonal connection, I'm finding very waking moments I am trying to retrace what we did a year ago, what we talked about, what we laughed about, and what kind of a mood he was in. Could he already know that in 3 months he would be gone? Was he aware this was the last time he would visit us, the last time we would share a hug? I find myself staring out the window, frozen in thought, trying to find answers that will never be clear.

Siblings should know that regardless of their relationship with their brother or sister, they're allowed to grieve the same way a parent might be grieving. Siblings should never be discounted as having less emotion about the loss of their brother or sister. Only you know the relationship you had with your brother or sister and must recognize they are worthy of your feelings about the loss.

If you know of anyone that has lost a sibling, reach out by asking him or her what their greatest memory they shared with their brother or sister and as a family, ask them what they did together that made them laugh. And by all means, give them the chance to share their special relationship.

Siblings have an enormous impact on who we are today. My brother may have suffered a mental illness that didn't always show the world his kind, thoughtful, creative side. However the suffering Steven did live with everyday has given me a perspective that is more tolerant and understanding to those that suffer from a mental illness. If you take the time to see their world through their lens it may not be as distorted as it appears from the outside.

Linda Moran Graves

12/27/09