PART 1

When and How Is Grief "Complicated"?

This first set of readings offers an excellent overview to the question of when and how grief is "complicate"—or whether such a term is appropriate. In many ways, Carolyn Ellis's chapter (chapter 1) causes us to seriously question whether holding onto and writing about the death of one's loved one is pathological or "complicated" in any way. Ellis makes a powerful and poignant case that it can be quite healing to cope with the death of a loved one in the long term by telling stories that become part of the survivor's sense of self and deepen her life. Instead of desiring to get rid of these emotions, Ellis argues that her memories of her brother, Rex, who died in the 1982 Air Florida 90 plane crash, allow her to keep him alive in her memory. Ellis has written extensively about her loss and reflects on many of these writings in her chapter. However, she offers some new insights upon her realization that her brother has now been dead longer than he had been alive and that the crash took place more than 30 years ago. She acknowledges this, in part, by focusing on the positive results for aviation safety that came from learning about the factors that precipitated that crash. Even so, her memories of Rex's life continue on.

Next, in chapter 2, Leeat Granek offers an outstanding review of historical debate as how to define grief and mourning. Granek opens her chapter with some discussion about her own recent experience of losing many close others—in particular, her mother—all within a year's time. Even with her extensive professional and personal experiences, Granek concedes that it is difficult to clearly discern "normal" versus "abnormal" grief reactions. She notes that, historically, grief has been conceptualized as a process to quickly recover from in order to return to "normal" (presumably, pre-loss) functioning. Granek does a superb job of highlighting how the push to pathologize grief in recent years came to be; yet, she adds that there still lacks a clear consensus on

what is complicated grief (or whether it should exist at all). Granek cautions that the sheer act of the pathologization of grief can profoundly influence how one sees oneself and has great implications for the creation of a sort of "grief industry." Granek concludes her chapter with discussion of data she collected highlighting the fairly commonly symptoms that the public often experiences due to grief that some may term "complicated." In doing so, Granek's piece also raises some very important questions about the wisdom of creating an absolute classification of complicated grief symptoms.

In chapter 3, Laura Kerr makes some fascinating observations that seek to understand how grief sometimes can best be understood in phases or stages and, often, only with the passage of time and perspective. Her analysis considers the role of attachment theory and how the bereaved cannot fully accept the reality of death or the possibility of new ways of relating to the deceased. Much of Kerr's chapter documents her own recollections of how her mother reacted to the death of her maternal grandfather when she (Kerr) was a child. Kerr discusses that while her mother was still responsive and loving after the death of her maternal grandfather, she couldn't quite understand why she often seemed absent—until Kerr herself had to contend with the death of her mother as an adult decades later. Though Kerr suggests that her mother was clinically depressed and suffering from complicated grief, she suggests that she also felt "frozen" at times after her mother's passing and found it difficult to fully process what had happened. Kerr suggests that it can be healing to not view grief as "unspoken" and to try to acknowledge how it alters one's sense of self. In doing so, the bereaved still can have a healthy, attached relationship with the deceased.

The last chapter of this section by Trish Staples (chapter 4) also offers some intriguing insights that challenge some assumptions about the negative qualities of complicated grief. After suffering through an unhappy marriage, Staples discusses how she found a new love in life who died suddenly and inexplicably soon after her remarriage. Staples candidly discusses her hospitalization due to depression and suicidal ideation. But, she also notes the importance of journaling as a means of noting her thoughts and perhaps keeping some sort of connection with her late husband. Though she believes that she likely would have met the criteria for complicated grief, she also believes that her grief allowed her stories to be told. In doing so, she suggests that she gained a sense of emotional, physical, and spiritual growth that likely would not have occurred had it not been for her suffering and grief. Staples's article suggests the larger issue of how to weigh the potential benefits (for example, treating depression and preventing suicide) and the costs (for example, personal growth) of treating complicated grief.

Chapter One

Seeking My Brother's Voice

Holding onto Long-Term Grief through Photographs, Stories, and Reflections

Carolyn Ellis

> *Death ends a life, but it does not end the relationship, which struggles on in the survivor's mind toward some final resolution, some clear meaning, which it perhaps never finds.* (Anderson, 1968, p. 281)

> *As we cherish memories, we return to freshen and deepen our understanding of those who died, attend to them again, bring them closer, embrace them in their absence, reconnect with some of the best in life, feel grateful, feel the warmth of our love for them, sense that they are grateful for our remembering, and feel the warmth of their love for us.* (Attig, 2001, p. 48)

It has been 30 years since my brother Rex died in a commercial airplane crash on his way to visit me. I recall the phone call, TV images of people floundering in the Potomac, searing pain and overwhelming sadness that nothing could relieve, the hope and then the anguish when the reality of loss sunk in. The details and feelings are vivid still, although I don't live in them anymore, and they no longer live in me. Still, sometimes it feels like the accident happened yesterday. At the same time, I now have trouble calling up an image of my brother's face; hearing the sounds of his voice; or telling stories about him, other than how he died.

My purpose in this chapter is to consider the lived experience of long-term grief by examining how I feel about and cope with the death of my brother. I introduce readers to the initial story I wrote about losing my brother (Ellis, 1993) and to the reflections I wrote 25 years after his death (Ellis, 2009). These provide background to the story I tell now about my continuing efforts

to maintain a connection with my brother. I write and reflect again through photos and stories to remember my brother and continue my relationship with him, and to add to the academic conversation about continuing bonds with lost loved ones (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996). Stories about long-term grief are rare. My hope is that this story shows how grief can change over time and that it opens a conversation about the different ways the process of grieving might be experienced over a lifetime.

Until the 1990s, most of the literature about grief of a long-term duration referred to these feelings as pathological, complicated, or unresolved.[1] Counselors and researchers advised grieving people to detach from grief and get on with life within a reasonable amount of time. The goal was to recognize that you no longer had a relationship with your lost loved one and that it was time to turn attention to other living people. Sooner or later, according to this view, the time comes to move on.

Beginning around the turn of the 21st century, some authors and practitioners began to turn from detachment theory toward maintaining continuing bonds with deceased loved ones (Klass et al., 1996; Valentine, 2008) and the value of holding onto grief (Hedtke & Winslade, 2004). These writers are more likely than detachment theorists to examine grief over a longer period of time. For example, Silverman and Klass (1996) discussed grief that occurs over a lifetime, and Rosenblatt (1996, p. 50) described loss as a "sequence, perhaps extending over our lifetime, of new losses or new realizations of loss." Others have questioned our need for and love affair with "closure." For example, Berns (2011) raised the possibility that you do not need closure to live again after loss and that remembrance itself might help you heal.

Certainly, intense grief of long duration that keeps you from living your life fully can be a problem that sometimes warrants professional care. Moreover, terms such as *pathological grief* or *complicated grief* can be important for suffering people who need to justify receiving funded care from professionals. Moreover, for some, there might be benefit to leaving well enough alone or using repression and denial as strategies to move on with life once loss has occurred. Nevertheless, I suggest that for many it can be healthy to hold on to grief as a way to maintain a relationship with a person who has died. Why should it be necessary to demand that those coping with the loss

[1] For example, see articles in (Stroebe, Stroebe, & Hansson, 1993) that summarize pathological and normal grief. Stroebe et al. (2000) discuss the complications and need for "greater accuracy" in identifying grief as pathological. However, they say that there is "fair consensus" in terms of pathology "about grief that has gone on 'too long'" (p. 68).

of a loved one's physical presence also detach from their feelings of love and need for the deceased (see also Hedtke & Winslade, 2004)?

The risk in writing a personal narrative focusing on long-term grief is that readers may think that grief has taken over my life. That is far from the case. Episodic and fragmented, these feelings are fleeting, are often connected to anniversary dates, such as my brother's birthday or the day he died, or they occur in the context of more recent losses, discussions of death in my classes, rereading stories I have written about him, or visiting with family. My memories occur along with—rather than in place of—my joy in and passion for living and relating to those currently in my life. The complex emotions attached to my brother become part of my self and deepen my experience of living. The stories I tell help keep him alive in my memory. When others read my stories, my brother becomes someone readers and I have in common—he becomes a part of what they and I share. Thus, I do not experience my grief as pathological or unresolved, or something I desire to get rid of.

Re-membering My Brother through Photographs[2]

I have written so much about my loss of Rex that I wonder what more I have to say. How do I write about someone who has been dead for so long? Though he has continued to live with me all these years in my writing and memories, I feel him fading away, and I wonder if there are ways to "work on" our relationship. Is it possible, at this stage, to learn more about him?

I start by gathering the few photos I have of Rex from around my home study, where I display them. Most of our family photos were destroyed in a flood in my sister's home in Mississippi during a hurricane, and a bag of old photos I had are now lost somewhere in the bowels of my paper-and-book-stuffed home.

I stare closely at the first photo, a four-by-six, protected by a glass frame. In it, Rex looks to be seven or eight years old. Crouched on his knees, he poses in front of a watermelon, his hand resting on top and eyes squinting as though he is looking into the sun. As I think about the large garden we always had as kids, I wonder if he grew the melon himself. He's clearly proud, probably because of the watermelon's large size. I remember how we always

[2] Following Hedke and Winslade (2004), "re-member" is hyphenated to indicate that we not only remember then, but also re-member now in that we include the dead as members in our lives.

complained about working in the garden and didn't think much about the fresh food we had every summer. Now I love flower gardening and look forward to the home-grown vegetables neighbors always share.

I continue examining the photo, looking first at one part, then the other. If I look deep enough, perhaps the photo will reveal more stories and memories of Rex. Suddenly pain ripples through my chest and sits in my gut. Then my mind takes over, remembering, remembering, the day of the crash. I am not an observer now. I feel an emptiness, an absence; I sigh. The strength of my reaction, 30 years later, surprises me. How could that little boy in the photo be dead?

My desire to describe what I feel brings me out of my feeling. I admire Rex's blond hair, short on the sides with the strands on top hanging almost to his eyebrows. "Put a roach in your hair," I can hear my dad demanding, meaning to add Brylcream or Vitalis so that the longer hair could be combed into a wave, sort of a modified short James Dean pompadour. A smile breaks out on my face, as I remember when Rex shaved his head as a teenager. As usual, my father had been after him to cut his hair short. Like the other kids, Rex wanted to grow it longer, but my father would have none of that. Insisting it was time for my brother to get his biweekly haircut, he gave Rex money and took him to the barbershop. When Rex came home, he strutted and showed off his shaven head, which fit my father's specifications—it was short. My father took it all in good cheer, as I recall, and left Rex alone about his hair after that. The family got plenty of laughs out of how Rex had outsmarted Father, and this event became a frequently told family story.

Now come other memories. The ones that rise first to my awareness are those I included in a story I wrote about Rex a few years after he died. I recall again how we used to fight, although our fights were short-lived, and we were friends afterwards. I think fighting was just a way to expel our kid energy. Often I would sit on top of him and hold his arms spread-eagle above his head. Then I would put my face close to his and threaten him with the spittle dangling from my lips, sucking it in just before it escaped. We never hurt each other. Well, except one time when he accidentally blackened my eye with a baseball bat. He cried when he saw my eye turn red, then purple. I made sure my parents understood it had been an accident so they wouldn't punish him. Another time I pretended I couldn't find a switch for my father who was going to spank Rex for swimming in the pond in winter, and he escaped the threatened spanking. We had a bond and could be counted on to protect each other.

I also loved to play tricks on Rex. I once borrowed his bike after he had failed to lock it securely. I told him I had picked the lock, so then he stopped

locking it. Instead, he often offered to let me ride it. Another time, when I was washing my hair in a washbasin in the bathroom, Rex called my name. When I didn't answer, he came into the bathroom to check on me. I let my head hang listlessly in the water. When he peered under my hair to see if I was breathing, I opened my eyes and said, "Boo." I felt bad when I saw the concern on his face. Of course, he immediately tried to hide his worry by hitting me—but only lightly.

These stories, among many that came to me quickly and vividly when I first wrote them many years ago, are now stamped on my memory, making it hard to access other stories that might lie beneath them. That's the thing about stories. You remember the story you wrote, which stands between you and the experience, which you can never really access again. The story becomes the experience.

I think photos have the same function. You remember a photo you have seen, and your mind plays tricks, making you believe you actually recall the experience you saw in the photo. Once I argued with my sister-in law Barbara that I had been present when my older brother Art gave her an engagement ring. Later, I ran into a photo my mom had of Barbara opening the many boxes inside of boxes that eventually held her ring, and I realized that I had remembered the photo and the stories that were told about this event, not the event itself.

Maybe that's what is happening here, as I look at this photo of Rex and "remember" him shaving his head. I search among the few old family photos I have on my computer, and there it is: a black-and-white photo of Rex pretending to comb his very white and bald head while looking in the mirror. He is all smiles. Even if I do remember the event—which now I am not sure of—the photo has helped sear the details of the stories I heard about it into my memory.

Intrigued, I return now to the photo of young Rex with the watermelon. Though I know full well that the result of "memory work" always "involves some transformation" (Bochner, 2007, p. 200), I seek to create the experience behind the photos, behind the stories I have written before. Here come some memories now to the forefront, events long ago silenced and put away. Once a minister held me down while Rex kissed my face over and over, then he held down Rex while I kissed his face over and over. We laughed and laughed, forgetting whatever we had been fighting about. I think I can feel those wet, slobbery kisses even now.

These specific memories are flooded with more general memories: keeping secrets from our parents; building playhouses, running over the piles

of sand and lumber; playing ball—basketball, football, softball—climbing trees; catching lightning bugs in jars; and playing games like hide-and-seek, "mother, may I," and "red light/green light." I imagine Rex in motion, running as fast as he can. Everyone used to say we looked alike. We acted alike too—high energy, always moving quickly, smiling and cheerful, passionate and intense. I often wondered if I caused my parents more pain after Rex died because I looked and acted so much like him.

Rex and I also were different. I excelled in academics. Two years behind me in school, Rex stood out as well, but more as an athlete, jokester, and musician. People loved his common-sense approach to life, charm, good nature, and seemingly unself-conscious ability to have fun no matter what. I have sometimes wished I had had a son because he might have looked like Rex and shared some of his ways.

Coming into view now, I see in my mind photos of many Christmases, Rex and his toy guns, my last doll—a bride doll; birthdays with decorated cakes and lit candles; family members in hospitals surrounded by family. Among the imagined photos, Rex appears now in real life, in his early teens, standing up to my father, who is threatening my mother. I close my eyes and listen carefully. I want to hear his voice, remember his mannerisms—how he walked, whistled, winked, scratched his nose, shook hands. I want to hear his laughter. But I can't.

I pick up the second photo now, a five-by-seven. Oh, there's that shit-eating grin, squinting yet crinkling eyes, big indented dimples, and strong square chin. A cap covers his hair, which hangs to his eyebrows and covers his ears. I would guess he is in his late teens, though I don't know for sure. He is heavier now, the size of a fullback, I think, which makes me recall how much he loved playing football in high school. "If you needed a few yards on third down, you always gave the ball to Rex," the high school coach said at the dedication of a field house named after Rex. During the games, I played in the band and in my senior year was the homecoming queen, no doubt partly due to Rex, the captain of the team, influencing his teammates to vote for me.

The flannel work shirt Rex wears in this photo reminds me of how he took over my father's construction business a few years before he died. He would line up little bottles of different size gravel so the older ladies could see the kind he was recommending for their driveways. Ah, they loved him, the older women. So did the younger ones.

I'm not sure, but it may be that Rex had imbibed a few drinks in this photo. Given how much he loved to party, it wouldn't surprise me. Later,

my sister Judi will say he had been drinking—she remembered the day in the photo—without my mentioning the possibility. I laugh as I think about the time we all got high on moonshine in a friend's cabin. Rex was dancing like a madman, and when I said I didn't want to dance with him because he was sweaty, he got miffed. Why do I remember that now? What is the significance? I think I've felt guilty all these years that I rejected him because of his sweat. If I could only dance with him now—and feel and smell his sweat.

Suddenly I can hear him. He has had a few drinks and is singing at the top of his lungs in a band. It's interesting that I can hear his singing voice but not his speaking one. He might not have been the best singer, but he was good enough, and his enthusiasm and wild abandonment were catching as he traced out the steps of the Temptations with his friends. I know I've seen a photo of him on stage, the band members in matching outfits. Am I really remembering him singing or am I recalling the photo? Does it matter? Either way, the image is vivid.

I fast-forward to a day when he scared all of us. He wrecked my red convertible. I was at college and can remember getting the call on the hall telephone, and crying when I heard the news. I don't remember who called. Fortunately, my hometown boyfriend was visiting me and offered comfort, even to take me home if I wanted to go. I didn't care about the car, just Rex, that he had battery acid in his eyes and might not see again.

Suddenly I remember something else. When my sister was cleaning out my mother's house, she found a story Rex had written about the accident. Knowing how much I like stories, she gave it to me. It is somewhere in my house. I look and I look, for hours, through the stacks of dust-covered papers that haven't been moved for years. I vow to clean up and throw away what I don't need. Days later I look again for hours. How could I have lost this precious document, his words, the only writing of his I have? I am sad that I must go on without it, just as I must go on without many photos—and without his physical presence.

I pick up the third photo, a small three-by-five. In this side view, he is older, mid-20s maybe, handsome still and very thoughtful and serious. He sports a mustache—which I never liked—and his hair is darker than before, a "dirty blonde," as my mother called it. His hair is the same color as mine is now (though mine has thinned and is mingled with grey). His eyes are deep set, almost closed, squinty even, his brows bushy. The photo has been cropped to portray only his face. But it doesn't matter. I remember the larger scene well. We were at my parents' home; I had come to visit from graduate

school with a new 35-mm camera. I remember taking this photo of Rex sitting outside at a picnic table where we had just eaten grilled hamburgers and hotdogs, all of us enjoying being together as a family. Everyone lingered and talked, unlike when we were growing up and left the table in a hurry to go our separate ways.

Rex's short hair in this photo reminds me that he was in the Marines. Where is the photo of him in his uniform? It was a big one, 8" × 12". I know I have it somewhere, but it was never one of my favorites. Anyway, when Rex came home after being discharged, he bought a Corvette and a motorcycle. I was scared to ride with him on the motorcycle, but did after he promised he wouldn't scare me.

We're riding fast up the mountains. I can feel the wind. I hold on tight. "Are you scared?" he asks. When I say yes, he slows down. Then, "just a little faster," he encourages, and I nod and loosen my grip. Soon, we are flying up the mountain, and I'm not frightened at all. I remember that event because it was so much fun and because he so much wanted me to enjoy the adventure with no fear, perhaps feel what he felt. He always looked out for me.

I pick up the fourth and last photo, an 8" × 10". Rex is holding his dog, Buffy, in his arms. On his back, Buffy is completely relaxed; Rex stares lovingly at her. I am mesmerized by the gentle way he holds his dog. Seeing him so loving makes me feel loving. I call my dogs Zen and Buddha to my side and pet them. Rex loved Buffy, in the same way I love my dogs. "She is my child," he used to say. I often say the same thing about mine.

Rex is dressed in tight-legged jeans over brown leather boots. I smile as I remember the time he visited me in New York in the late 1970s while I was a graduate student there. We drive into the city, his first time. As we walk in Greenwich Village, gay men eye him up and down. "It's because of your short military style haircut," I explain, wanting him to be comfortable, "and your tight narrow-legged pants, tight shirt, and leather boots. You're dressed like they are, not like the rest of us hippies with our long hair and bell-bottomed jeans." Gay men are always ahead of the curve, their fashion leading the way for the rest of us. Rex, from a small town in the mountains, was behind the curve. Interesting that at that moment the two groups intersected. I was surprised by how open Rex was to the stares of the men, especially since he was a small-town boy who had only rarely been out of the Virginia mountains. As I recall stories about how he used to meet tourists in town and invite them to dinner and to spend the night, I am reminded that Rex never met a stranger.

I pick up each photo again. This time I wipe the dust off the glass with the end of my shirt, trying to get a better look, hoping that the photos will reveal something more. I take the photos out of their frames, to see if there are dates on the backs, but no luck. I stare; I sigh. Thirty years. Where did the time go? He would have been close to 59 now. Instead he will always be seven, or 17, or 27, or whatever age he is in the few photos I have, whatever age he is in our memories of him and his short life on earth—while we all continue to age.

I load the photos on the computer and move back and forth between them. On my screen, they are bigger and more brilliant than in hard copy. It's that smile, I think; it gets me every time. And his sensitivity, how tuned in to others he could be. I feel warmth in my heart. The absence is still there, but is filled now with thoughts of and affection for Rex.

I admire his hands in several of the photos and compare them with mine. My fingers are longer and narrower, with more veins showing. (Perhaps because my hands are so much older than his?) I wonder about the ring on his little finger, which I had not noticed before. Had that been Daddy's? Mom gave Daddy's old wedding band to Rex, and he had it resized to fit his little finger. I think of how close Rex was to Daddy and how hard he tried to please him when he took over the construction business. Sensitive to my father's needs, Rex paid Daddy to run errands and continue to be a part of the business. Once Rex died, my father tried to restart the business, but his heart was no longer in it.

I hit "I'm feeling lucky" in the Picasa editing program, and Rex's face comes in clearer and brighter on the screen. I am feeling lucky, lucky for having known Rex. I like remembering him, the details of our time together. It feels pleasant to experience these feelings, even the intense grief. These feelings bring him closer to me and reinforce that he still is part of my life. The closeness I feel takes over any pain that is still present.

Re-membering My Brother through Stories: "There Are Survivors"

Finally, I put away the photos and pick up "There Are Survivors," a story I published in 1993 about Rex's death (Ellis, 1993). Rex had been on his way to visit me in Tampa when his plane crashed into the Potomac River. We were becoming close adult friends who wanted to spend time together, and I had been so excited to see him. I read quickly through my description

of that day, jumping from scene to scene, my memory of the words I wrote filling in the storyline I skip. I know this version of the story by heart.

Scene One: *The Crash*[3]

Rex was scheduled to arrive today, Friday, January 13, 1982. Although I was supposed to meet him at 4:30, his plane was just ready for takeoff from Washington when I called the airline at 3:45. Since I had invited several friends to dinner, I was glad for the extra time.

"Hey, what you doing?" my older brother Art asks when I pick up the ringing phone. I am surprised to hear from him, and, in spite of the lightness of his words, I detect worry in his voice. Rather quickly, he asks, "Has Rex gotten there yet?"

"No, his plane has been delayed. Why?" Already I feel alarmed.

"Oh, someone called Mom and said a plane had crashed, and she thought they said something about Tampa. I just want to reassure her that Rex is okay. You know how she worries."

Although he says this nonchalantly, I tense up because I feel how hard he is working to normalize this conversation. Then I speak from inside a numb fog, "Where did they say the plane was headed?"

"Well, she thought they said it was coming from Tampa to Washington."

"Then that can't be it," I respond too quickly, adrenalin now starting to pump. We breathe.

Into the silence my brother says, "But there was confusion because they said it was Flight 90."

"That's his flight number, but Mom probably just got the number wrong." Yes, that's the explanation, I assure myself.

"No," he says. "I just heard the number myself on the radio."

"Did they say Air Florida?"

"I don't know, just that it had crashed into the Potomac."

"Oh, God, I'll call the airline and call you right back."

Flashes of lightning go off behind my eyes. My breathing speeds up, yet I am suffocating. As I dial, my hands shake, and I say aloud over and over, "No, please, God." Struck by the triviality of my everyday concerns, I remember how rushed I had felt getting ready for Rex's arrival and how important that had seemed. Now, if he is only alive, nothing else will matter. Of course he is,

[3] This section includes excerpts from Ellis, 1993, pp. 711–730.

I admonish myself. Calm down. Mom has this all messed up. But then how did Art hear the same flight number?

I get a busy signal a couple of times before an Air Florida agent responds, "Air Florida, may I help you?"

The familiar greeting comforts me. See, there's nothing wrong, I reassure myself. "Yes, I want information on an arrival time."

"Certainly. What is the flight number?" he asks cheerfully.

"Flight 90."

Now his voice takes on a businesslike quality as he quickly replies, "We cannot give out information on that flight."

"What do you mean you 'can't give out information on that flight'?"

"We can't give out information on that flight," he repeats.

My heart pounds as I calmly ask, "Did an Air Florida plane crash today?"

"Yes."

"Was it going from Washington to Tampa?"

"Yes," he says, seeming relieved to answer my questions.

"How many flights do you have going from Washington to Tampa today?"

"Two."

"When were they scheduled?"

"One this morning. One this afternoon."

"Did the one this morning make it?"

"Yes."

"Thank you very much," I say softly and hang up the phone, my heart pounding.

Art answers on the first ring. "There was a crash," I say. "And it sounds like it was Rex's plane."

"They are saying now there are survivors," says my brother, and I feel hope. He continues, "I'm going to Mom and Dad's. They're pretty upset. They're going to be more upset."

"Okay, yes, go. We'll keep in touch."

Now I am alone, in shock, adrenalin rushing through my body. Numb on the outside, my insides are overstimulated. I tumble slowly through blank space. "Please, God, no," I hear myself moaning deeply from my gut. I move quickly to turn on the television. "Flight 90 crashes," it rings in my ears. "There are survivors in the water being rescued. Look, another head." This is not a movie, or an instant replay. I sit, my arms wrapped around my body, and sway back and forth 12 inches from the TV, breathing deeply and groaning. My eyes are glued to the rescue of the victims from the Potomac, and I search frantically for Rex. "He has to be there," I say out loud. In a daze, I am

conscious of myself watching the TV as part of the scene. Reality becomes hazy, and more multilayered and boundary-less than usual.

A car approaches and I know from the familiar sound that it is Gene, my partner, and Beth, his daughter, home from shopping. When I rush to the door, the fog lifts suddenly and the slow motion scene I am in slips into fast forward. "What's wrong, honey?" Gene asks as he steps through the door, drops his packages to the floor, and embraces me.

Quietly and desperately, I say, "My brother's plane crashed."

"Oh, my God," he says calmly. Do something, I want to yell. Make it okay. But I say nothing. His body quivers; his embrace tightens. It feels good to be held and to have told someone. Not just someone. Gene, my anchor. He will know what to do and how to think about what has happened. My body slumps against his. "Oh, my God," he says again.

"It doesn't seem real," I say.

"Death never does," he replies. "But it is." Death? Why is he talking about death? It's just a crash. I cry quietly.

Then like a shot, I remember, "The TV. I've got to get back to the TV. There are survivors," and I break free from his embrace. That's right, he doesn't know there are survivors. That's why he's talking about death. "I'll see Rex being pulled from the river," I say loudly, fists clenched in the air. "Then I'll know he's all right. He had to make it. He's tough. There are survivors," I repeat.

Beth and Gene don't watch the instant replays of the people floundering in the icy water. Why do they sit silently at the kitchen table? They should be helping me look for Rex. They must not believe me. But they don't know him like I do. He can get himself out of anything. Any minute his head will appear. I continue rocking back and forth with my hands clasped together, periodically putting my face against the television screen to get a closer view. But I cannot find my brother in the Monet-like dots and lines. Hope and desperation alternate—hope when a new survivor is sighted, desperation when it is not Rex. There must be more survivors. "Rex, pop up out of the fucking water," I scream.

The announcers talk about the hero who just died saving others. "That must be Rex," I say, feeling proud. "He would do that. That's what he was like." Was? Why am I using the past tense? "He's not dead," I say. "I know he isn't." But if he has to be dead, I want him to be the hero. But then I will be angry that he could have saved himself and didn't. Why aren't Gene and Beth responding to me? They sit, silent, sad, watching me. He's not dead. Quit acting like he's dead. Of course, he's not dead. Not my brother.

I keep my eyes peeled to what are now the same instant replays of the same people being pulled out of the same river. Twelve people have survived. Then they announce seven. Then there are five. And one dead hero.

Scene Two: *Small-Town Grief*

What will it be like to see my parents? I take a deep breath, my head swims, and I walk into the house. My dad cries and holds onto me. Already in my caretaker role, I have no tears. My mom's body is rigid in response to my hug. "It's going to be okay," I say. "We'll talk."

"It won't be okay," she says angrily. "He's dead. He's not coming back." I am silenced by the truth of her response.

I ignore the two local ministers I don't know and hug Barbara, my sister-in-law, who whispers into my ear, "They found his body."

"Thank God," I say, feeling great relief and then wonder why. "When?"

"They called an hour ago."

My brother Art and I hug each other tightly. The atmosphere feels like death. When the town sheriff and the funeral director stop on their way to Washington to identify and bring back my brother's body, my mother sobs, "Bring my boy home." My grief for her then, and for myself, threatens to take me over. Afraid, I choke it down.

"A mother's pain is the worst there is," my mother says, leaving me no place to share my grief. The only time I had for myself was when I showered. I loved feeling the hot water run over my body. As I cried and relaxed, the pain would break through my numbness and a moan from deep in my being would escape. Amazed at the intensity of the pain, I pushed it down. I can't deal with you now. Would I ever be able to? I talked out loud to Rex, telling him how much I already missed him. "Rex, help me deal with this. Help me comfort Mom and Dad." It was a close, peaceful feeing.

"I am communicating with Rex," I tell my mom, thinking she will like that I am being "religious," even though it doesn't fit into her Lutheran doctrine.

"What kind of religion do you have anyway? You can't talk to the dead," she replies, and I shrug.

The people came. Three to four hundred of them. They occupied my parents and validated for me how important Rex had been. I became the greeter, letting them in, hugging, listening to them marvel at how I had changed, and then directing them to my parents, who sat side by side in their La-Z-Boy chairs. Offering their sympathies, men looked sad and stoically

held my father's hand and kissed my mother. Women were more likely to cry openly with my mother and often with my father, sometimes falling in sobs into my parents' arms. Older people comforted, while the younger ones stammered about not knowing what to say. That would come with experience. My mother cried continually and my father wiped tears constantly. I was the dry-eyed director, who craved and feared collapsing into my parents' embrace.

The next day, Monday, is the funeral. The funeral parade leaves from our house. A town policeman, my eighth-grade boyfriend, holds up traffic, so we can enter the main road. Now he stands, with rigid posture and hat held over his chest, crying openly.

At the funeral home, the curtain is drawn before we approach the casket so that the crowd cannot see the family's grief. But it is impossible to keep it hidden. Mom screams when she sees the casket, and Art holds on tightly as she breaks out into loud sobs. The rest of us cry softly, staring at the casket draped by the American flag, surrounded by the flowers that people weren't supposed to send. I am removed. This isn't what I want. I kiss the casket.

When the curtain is opened, I see that the funeral home is packed. I am glad that hundreds of people stand in the hall and outside in below-zero weather, while others wait in their cars to go to the cemetery. Rex is here, watching with me, like Tom Sawyer. How he relishes all these people. You ham. You would have loved all the media coverage of your death. I smile. And just think, Rex, you lucky stiff, you will never have to suffer through the death of loved ones.

Scene Three: *Letting Go/Holding On*

Rex's friends organize a party. "A better way to remember him," we say. But it isn't what we want either. We want Rex. Okay, the joke is over, Rex, come out of hiding. "If the boy would just send me a sign that he's okay, I would feel better," a friend says. "He left so suddenly." "Yeah, have a drink in Heaven and tell us how it is." But our gayness keeps switching back to serious talk. I have a Scotch, and my feeling breaks through, my sobs catching me by surprise. "I am tired of supporting everyone, including myself," I say to Rex's friends who gather around me. "I don't know why I feel I have to be so strong."

"You don't. Let go," I hear, and I feel a bond with the people who embrace me as I sob.

Now it would be happening, a few seconds after take-off. There is the bridge it hit. Here is how his head snapped forward. Boom. I let my head

fall into the seat in front of me. The vivid picture of the gash in Rex's head helps me reenact the scene—this time and every time I fly into or out of Washington, DC.

Re-membering My Brother Through Reflections in Writing and Teaching[4]

I first wrote "There Are Survivors" as part of a larger project, *Final Negotiations,* which told the story of losing my partner Gene in 1985 (Ellis, 1995). The chapter about my brother was so intense that some readers advised me to take it out of the book and publish it on its own, which I did (Ellis, 1993).

Writing about this experience was my first venture into autoethnography, where I focused on my personal experience to understand life sociologically. I also wrote to get through the experience, to make it into something I could live in and with, to become a survivor of what had happened. I wrote because I hoped that my story would offer companionship to others going through similar losses. I wrote to memorialize my brother and to stay connected to him, though I didn't know that at the time.

I have revisited this story many times. Writing in 2006, I included it as part of my book, *Revision* (Ellis, 2009), which was slated to be a collection of my previously published stories. But when I started with "There are Survivors," I felt too much had happened in the 15 years since I had published this story, and I began to think about how I might narrate this loss now, 25 years after the event. I wondered how my feelings of long-term grief were different from what I had experienced shortly after Rex's death.

I reflected on what had happened, examining my feelings, how readers had responded to the story (see, for example, Bochner 2005; Kleinman, 1993), and the critiques of my personal narrative approach to writing about grief. My goal became to turn the narrative snapshots I had written in the past into a form more akin to a video—a text in motion—one in which I dragged and dropped in new experiences as well as revised interpretations of old storylines, then reordered and restoried them. The storyline about my brother involved my long-term experience of grief and the effect that writing about it and using the story in classes had on my experience.

Living, writing, and publishing this story about the loss of my brother changed how I live and think. It increased my appreciation for the qualities of caring, love, vulnerability, and relational connection. For me, these

[4] Portions of this section are a condensed and edited adaption of Ellis, 2009, pp. 152–154.

characteristics are part of the core of what makes us human, and I want to express them in my writing. Writing this story has helped me survive the loss of my brother (and perhaps subsequent losses) and understand the value of writing in overcoming trauma (Pennebaker, 1990).

None of these positive sentiments mean I am free from the pain of loss. Every time I reread this story I shed tears, even now, 25 years after Rex's death. Though the pain is not as intense as it was shortly after he died, the powerful way it descends on my life still rattles me. When Rex died, the acute pain and shock took over my life. That sense of being overwhelmed has been muted by the passing of time. But in its place is a consistent gnawing hole of long-term grief that sometimes feels like it is trying to ingest my very being. I don't feel grief all the time, nor is the sensation always intense. But its presence reminds me that I will lose others and that I surely will die. Every time I experience a new loss, I feel that it also contains renewed grief over losing Rex (see Rosenblatt, 1996). Rex was my first significant loss—a loss that showed me I had no control over death, made me realize my own mortality since we were close in age, and led to the loss of innocence I experienced earlier in life when death stayed out of my conscious awareness (Rosenblatt, 1996). Perhaps this loss hits me so strongly because Rex was so young and his death was so sudden; though inconsistent, the majority of studies describe sudden loss as leading to more intense, distressing, and prolonged grief than does anticipated loss.[5] It also was a loss of someone whose role in my life would not be replaced, a loss of someone who knew me from childhood and had he lived would have known me for most of my life.

Since I experience sadness and grief whenever I assign, reread, and discuss "There Are Survivors" in my classes, workshops, and lectures, I often wonder about the value of continual exposure to this story and reading and writing loss narratives in general. Does my exposure to this story make my grief more frequent and deeply felt than otherwise might happen? Perhaps reentering the experience as I do every time I read this story does bring up those sharp signifiers of loss that generate the "gnawing hole" feeling (as other remembrances do as well). Does that mean it might be better not to expose myself time and again to this story? Might it be better to "just move on"?

Some of the feelings of loss I experience on revisiting this story are intentional on my part. When I reread this story, I seek to place myself in an

[5] See, for example, Lehman, Wortman, and Williams (1987); Sanders (1982); and the literature review in Carr, House, Wortman, Nesse, and Kessler (2001).

emotional space of grief so that I might better talk about what happened; thus I expect to feel grief. Yet I also distance myself so that I might analyze from afar and not break down emotionally as I speak about what happened; thus the feelings are controlled to an extent. The acute effects of relived grief are short term, halted by the responsibility of leading seminars and helping students comfortably discuss loss and grief—their own as well as mine—and by the need to continue on with the day's activities and demands once class is over.

Frequent exposure to this story also brings its own rewards. I have come to feel that grieving well can (or must) include revisiting loss. Reading and remembering enhance the attachment I continue to have with my brother. As Arthur Frank (1991, p. 41) says: "To grieve well is to value what you have lost. When you value even the feeling of loss, you value life itself, and you begin to live again."

In spite of my mother's protestations that you can't talk to the dead, I continue to have conversations with Rex in my mind and with my students and workshop colleagues about him. I appreciate the gift of stories: that Rex can be a topic of conversation and memory for me and that I can keep him present for myself and introduce my relationship to him to many people. Narrative then has a memorial function (Bochner, 2007). In this way, instead of "letting go," which is the conventional wisdom offered by most grief counseling, I can continue "holding on" (Hedtke & Winslade, 2004).

Rereading this story and having these feelings remind me to be compassionate and caring rather than critical and judgmental. My feelings of vulnerability make me more sensitive to others' vulnerabilities and our common plights. When people react to this story out of their own grief or empathy for mine, I feel part of a community of caring people. That belonging gives me comfort and makes me want to comfort others, to feel we are not alone in our grief. In the process, I feel human and alive.

Readers, including students, who respond to my writing say they appreciate the anticipatory socialization into feeling and coping with grief that my stories provide. Those who have experienced grief welcome the companionship and the opportunity to feel from an aesthetic distance about the experience. Comparing their grief to mine helps them feel less alone. Many express that what I write gives them permission to tell their stories. I believe that writing and reading stories such as these has the potential to help us all be more empathic.

Sometimes when I read this story, I pretend I am reading someone else's story. Then I feel for Rex's siblings, who try to cope and often stifle their own grief to help their parents through theirs; for this family, who has

suffered the ultimate interruption and whose lives will never be the same; for this little town, represented by the policeman who cries as the family drives by on their way to the funeral. I feel for Carolyn: the young woman whose world has fallen apart and whose world view has been disrupted, her optimism shredded by the reality of loss; the young woman who tries to be strong, hoping that somehow strength and control might ward off her grief and vulnerability. I wonder about the confusion she experiences when she can't connect with her mother, a person she needs to touch and love, and be loved back, to release her own grief.

Further Reflections: Re-membering My Brother in 2011

On the day I began writing this chapter, I had assigned "There Are Survivors" to my Communicating Grief and Loss class. I like for them to read it early in the semester because it breaks the ice and gets students talking. I can feel the students' eyes on me when I come to class that day. They see me differently now; they are different with each other; I am different with them. We no longer are teacher and students who don't know each other; now we are human beings sharing our pain.

"I feel I am introducing Rex to you. Your responses, my feelings, our conversation makes him come alive in my life," I explain. I tell them how I cried when I reread the story for class. I tell them about this chapter I am writing and I pass around the photos of Rex, which they reverently examine and return to me.

I talk then about the circle of life/death, and most of the students seem to be with me. When I ask one male student, squirming in his seat, what he is thinking, he says, "I don't like to think about death. So I don't. Maybe that's because I'm young." "I'll be glad when we get to happiness," says a second male. "We've been talking about happiness," I say, interrupting the women who are complaining that men can't deal with their feelings. "We talk about death and loss to remind us of our common humanity and to live the best life we can. This course is a celebration of life."

I recognize that students' resistance to, even denial of, death allows them to maintain some distance, providing an effective coping mechanism at least in the short term. I try not to take their defenses from them, understanding that their resistance gives them a reprieve and allows them to live free of the angst of mortality. Because of my age and experience with loss, I no longer have the same luxury of forgetting and delaying. My goal is to give students

an opportunity to recognize that life is finite and consider taking that fact into account as they figure out how to live.

"I have not lived—and do not want to live—inundated by death, but I want to be aware of it," I say. "Staying aware of loss reminds me of the dialectic of vitality and mortality; this consciousness helps me incorporate absence into my life and sensitivities and, at the same time, strive to live a vital life. I try 'to live as though [I'll] live forever, yet be prepared to die tomorrow' (Shames & Barton, 2004, p. 7). When I keep death on my shoulder, my day-to-day world also is filled with happiness, satisfaction, passion, and engagement, in spite of (because of?) the losses I have experienced and the ones I know will be there again someday. Part of this good feeling for me comes from writing from the heart and rewriting myself and my intimate relationships."

In many ways, what I try to do for myself and what I advocate in the classroom is a form of the resilience and strengths-based practice now popular among social workers and social support groups. I partner with students to assist them in managing the impossible, "imagining the possible," and thinking of themselves as agents "able to effect some change in [their lives], having *goals* that not only have promise but also pathways to their accomplishment—pathways that may be short or long, full of ruts or smooth, well-lit or darkened" (Saleebey, 2000, p.133). Together we imagine and then enact the possible through listening and telling, and then writing and rewriting.

As I walk back to my office from my classroom, I note that my grief feels gentler and comes less often now than it did five years ago when I wrote about my brother in *Revision*. Even with the photos, the memories and feelings are more distant, and I have to search harder to find them. I wonder, are there other ways to remember my brother?

Re-membering in Difficult Places: Trying out Family Conversations and Media Coverage, October 2011

I am excited to visit Art and Barbara, my older brother and his wife, who moved into my mother's home in Luray, Virginia after she died in 2002. My sister Judi and her husband Ron also are joining us there, and bringing their daughter, her husband, and their four-year-old daughter. It will be nice to have a reunion, our first in four years, and to see each other in a context that

doesn't involve death. I wonder whether we will talk about Rex. Will he be a presence or just be an empty chair at the table? Before I arrive, I e-mail the four photos of Rex to my siblings and ask them to think about the memories the photos stimulate.

Upon arriving in Luray, I am greeted by Art's announcement that he can't remember the past. He refuses to talk when I turn on the tape recorder, and he rushes out of the room when Barbara and I look at the photos. I think he is afraid of breaking down, or feeling sad, but later Barbara says, "I asked him why he won't look at the photos. He said it's because he really doesn't remember anything about them." Yet later in the day, he talks briefly about not recognizing Rex after he got his head shaved and he remembers the name of Rex's dog. Then after a few drinks, he tells me funny stories about Rex, usually involving heavy drinking and acting out in some way. He tells them quickly, laughing, then leaves the room.

"He does not think to look deeply into each photo," Barbara says. "He would not be comfortable doing that." Barbara and I do look closely at the photos, discussing how old Rex is in each one and where and when it took place. As we look at the photo where he might have been drinking, her memory goes to the times when my two brothers were partying together. "Rex was 15 years younger," she says, "and my husband was acting like he was Rex's age, instead of being the older brother."

"You know," she says, "Rex used to say he didn't want to grow old. I think of that sometimes."

When Judi looks at the photos, she talks in general about how sensitive our brother was. "Look how thoughtful he is in that photo," she says. "He was so handsome. Look at how sweet he is with his dog."

"Yes," I respond, "it's interesting that all four of us siblings are so crazy about dogs."

"Especially since we didn't have dogs when we were kids," Judi says.

We approach the task enthusiastically, but there are many silences and few details. It feels as though we are trying too hard to remember. So much time has passed; there doesn't seem to be much to say.

When we stop for dinner, my sister gives the blessing and lovingly mentions our mother, who died nine years before, but not our father, who died 24 years before. And not Rex. I am disappointed. It is my mom's birthday that day and this is her home we are in, so I understand. But still … why isn't our father here? Why isn't Rex? I want to add something, but no words come to me. I am afraid I will break down if I speak, and I don't want to do that on this occasion when we are all so happy to be together.

Later, I decide to go to the graves of my brother, mother, father, and aunt. Art volunteers to go with me. We are very goal oriented, replacing the artificial white lilies with flowers of autumn orange and yellow, checking to see if the Styrofoam in the vases needs replacing. Fearing I will make my brother uncomfortable, I don't say anything about our dead relatives or linger at the graves. Recalling how keeping up the graves was very important to our mom, I am pleased we are able to do this together.

Afterward, I visit the mother of a good friend of Rex's. "If Rex had lived, this community would have been different. He would have shaken it up," she says. "Yes, he was always a community person," I respond, "and he cared greatly about this little town." Our short conversation about Rex reminds me of how important he was to this community.

After being back in Tampa a while, I again pick up this chapter. I note that it is October 25, 2011, Rex's 59th birthday, and that he has now been dead longer than he lived. Still seeking information, I look up my brother's plane crash online, something I have never done before. I am surprised when I find videos and first-hand, detailed, emotional, and vivid descriptions of the crash site as well as audios of the pilots' last words synchronized with an illustration of the crash and stories of pilot error. "Why couldn't his pilot have been Sully, who landed a plane safely on the Hudson?" I ask myself, though I know this is a dead-end question.

"You could hear the screams of the survivors," I read in a Wikipedia article ("Air Florida," n.d.). I am overcome with thoughts of Rex struggling for life. Then "According to the coroner, Williams [the hero] was the only passenger to die by downing." There it is. So that's how he died. I imagine his head hitting the seat, and I am there beside him, feeling the impact.

I watch a video of the survivors being rescued, a man swimming out and risking his life to save a female passenger. My mind screams, "My brother is in that water!"

Suddenly, my body rebels. My face flashes hot, my stomach quivers, I feel icy cold. I gulp, take deep breaths, and I know—for sure—that this is not working as a way to remember. There are limits to what I want to know and remember. I go outside for some fresh air.

When I return to my desk, I concentrate on an article that discusses in detail the good that came out of this crash. "While most air disasters quickly become historical footnotes, aviation safety experts say few crashes have left a legacy as sweeping as Air Florida Flight 90" (Wilber, 2007, para. 4). Along with lessons about communication and management skills, this crash also became a case study for training pilots and rescue crews, an impetus

for reforms in pilot training and regulations and for the development of an improved rescue harness for use in helicopter recoveries, as well as for improvements in many other industries. The vice chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board said, "This accident was ingrained in the minds of the entire world, and we watched the recovery efforts as they happened. I don't know of any other accident that has had this amount of impact on aviation but also in other industries" (Wilber, 2007, para. 5). I had no idea of the importance this crash had, and I feel proud that something good came from Rex's death. Still, that does not erase my loss.

Finding Rex's Voice

If only I could hear Rex's voice, I think, then I might feel that I had found the connection I am seeking. I hunt again for the story Rex wrote about his car accident. Maybe there I will find clues about who he was, things I have forgotten or never knew. Obsessed, I look through piles of yellowed papers and flip through files that have been unopened for decades. Surely I have put it somewhere safe; it has to be here. Just as I tell myself I must give up, I see a large scrapbook on the bottom shelf of my bookcase. Tucked inside, among all the newspaper clippings my mom kept of weddings and accolades of local people she knew, are nine lined pages torn out of a notebook. Cursive handwriting covers the front and back of each one. Rex's cursive leans to the right, yet it is a free-style, undisciplined, just as he was. Someone has written a few comments in response in the margins and put check plus marks at the top of each two-page segment. Though a continuous story about the accident, it is clear that the nine two-page segments were written at different times; the ink is different shades of blue, the responder uses different colors to write the remarks on each of the sections, and Rex ends each part with a sentence about what he will talk about next time. Perhaps this was a school assignment.

I read his text hungrily, looking for what I can't find in the photos, stories, newspapers, and family conversations. He writes in detail about the car accident, which happened on the day of his 17th birthday, as he was on his way to pick up his girlfriend for a homecoming dance. Writing from his perspective more than a year later, he details the aftermath of the accident as well. The accident was not his fault, and the other man's insurance paid all the bills. As I had recalled, he got battery acid in his eyes and couldn't see for days. He is not afraid of writing about how he cried out of fear and was lonely in the hospital, or how scared he was a year later driving down the

same road again to a homecoming dance to pick up the same girl, so frightened he stopped the car and got out to make sure no other car was coming, or how on his birthday he "just started crying" because he was so "happy to be home and well." His biggest concern, next to not seeing, was that he wouldn't be able to play football. During recovery, as he was watching a game being played, he wrote,

> As the game went on I became sick. I wanted to play so bad I actually got sick on my stomach. The boy that had taken my place wasn't doing the job and we were getting killed. I'm not saying that I was that good of player, but when you are used to playing with a certain eleven players and one is missing it really throws the timing of your plays off. Anyway Strasberg beat us pretty bad.

He convinces the doctor to let him play the next week. He is modest about his abilities in terms of catching the ball. He wrote,

> One thing that stands out in my mind about the game was when I caught a pass. It was fourth down and about five yards for the first down. Usually we would have punted, but this time we decided to pass and try to get the first down. We still lined up in punt formation to make them think we were going to punt. When the ball was snapped there were two men covering the other receiver and there were none on me. I remember running down the field about ten yards and cutting to the outside. Then I remember seeing a brown blob coming toward me. I didn't think they were throwing a pass to me because I didn't have very good hands and there weren't many passes thrown to me. But sure enough it was a pass to me, and by luck I caught if for a first down. I know it was luck because I didn't really see the ball.

On page 16, he concludes with: "I feel like God let me keep my sight for some reason and one of these days I'm going to find out." I wonder then if he ever did.

The last story details what football meant to him.

> Fridays during football season is a very bad day for me. Because Friday is the day that the football game is played. I have trouble keeping my mind on anything but football. I especially have trouble concentrating when I hear the band practicing for the game that night.

> On Thursday night I usually go to bed with butterflies and I keep the butterflies until the game starts. Butterflies affect different people in different ways. Butterflies make me feel like before I give an oral book report only about ten times worse. I sometimes think instead of butterflies in my stomach, there are vultures or something down there.
>
> During the summer weeks of practice I sometimes wonder why I'm out there running, sweating and literally getting the "hell" BEAT out of me, when I could be somewhere swimming, drinking Pepsi colas (or something else) and having a good time. When school finally starts and the day of the first game comes and there's the pep rally and the cheerleaders and fans yelling for me and the team, I then know that it was worth the effort.
>
> When Friday comes I'm one of the most cocky and proudest persons in school. When I put that jersey on I'm really proud. The reason I'm like this is because I know I'm one out of thirty-some guys that could make the football team, and to me that is something to be proud of. No one can imagine how hard it is to play football, unless they have played themselves.
>
> Friday comes, then the football game passes and it is now Saturday morning. You wake up and feel like you have been run over by a Mack truck. If we won, the aches and pains don't matter, but if you lost, the aches and pains hurt a little more.
>
> I definitely believe football helps build you into a man. Football teaches you that just because you are behind, that is no reason to give up. Just keep trying and if you try hard enough you'll win in the game of football and in the game of life.

Reading my brother's words brings alive his spirit, energy, emotionality, and passion for life in ways that photos, our memories and storytelling, and my writing do not. His words bring him here to me now, in ways I haven't imagined before. Though I don't have his corporeal presence, his presence in my memory is comforting. I have enjoyed our visit, our time together, and feel that my relationship with my brother has grown and changed. I wonder if I'll still feel this closeness tomorrow? or next week? or next year? I put the photos back in their proper places, my books and papers I've written about Rex back on the shelf, and his words back into my mom's scrapbook, vowing that this time I won't forget where they are.

Anniversaries

On Friday, January 13, 2012, the 30th anniversary of my brother's death, I send e-mails to my siblings that say, "Thinking of our dear brother today. Love, Carolyn."

"Are you focusing on this anniversary day?" asks my partner Art, when the crash flashes on the TV news program we watch later that day.

"Not nearly as much as I'm thinking about our wedding anniversary tomorrow, January 14th. Do you believe we've been married now 17 years and together for 22?"

"Don't make any plans tomorrow," says Art. "I have a surprise planned for you."

Dream Coda: February 29, 2012

I wake up from a rare dream about Rex. In it, I am at our childhood home, waiting for Rex, who is coming home after a long time away. When a car arrives in the middle of the night, I know it is Rex and I get up to greet him. A woman comes through the door, but not Rex. "He has taken a very sick friend to the hospital," she says. "It doesn't look good." Disappointed, I stay up to wait for his return, wondering if we will be as close as we used to be, or if he will be distant as he was the last time I saw him. When he arrives, I approach him with open arms, eager to touch and hug him, but he holds me back with an outstretched arm. "I am too sweaty," he says. As I slowly awaken, he gradually disappears.

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