

# Family



## Raising Special Children

I have heard the saying, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." In my circumstances the "village" was not there. I alone was the village.

On August 2, 1980, my first daughter was born. I named her Irene. She was 16 inches long and weighed 6 lbs. 7 oz. I was a proud mom. I was nursing her when my doctor came in my room. He said that she was going to be a dwarf. The news was devastating to me. I held that little infant so close to me and prayed for strength and courage. When I was discharged from the hospital there was no "village" waiting at home. Her daddy did not warn me that all the females in his family have a history of a syndrome, which causes dwarfism and hearing and vision loss.

When Irene began to walk her physical health declined. She brought picture books close to her face. She watched TV close up. The ophthalmologist checked her vision. My one-year-old had to wear thick glasses. Her peers, church family, people in stores, out dining, everywhere we went they stared at her. She continued to bump into furniture even with her glasses on. I really began to worry. We ended up back at the ophthalmologist's office. The doctor wanted to do more tests. One of the tests required Irene to be put under anesthesia. After the test the doctor gave me the bad news. My two-year-old daughter's retina had detached. It was too far gone; surgery would not help. We got a second opinion. The second doctor did the surgery, but it left Irene's left eye deformed. My poor child suffered so at such a young age.

At the same time Irene was having vision problems, she was only partially hearing. I took her to an otolaryngologist. She said Irene would need hearing aids. So now I have a three-year-old toddler partially blind and hard of hearing! What was a mother to do?

First I let my child know she had my support. I am one person, but I became that "village" for my child. I attended lots of meetings for parents of children with medical handicaps. She was in a special school for a year and a half. Then I decided to do things my way because this was the child The Divine had given me. I had her mainstreamed in school from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. I had her surrounded by people that do not have her problems. She was an A-B student.

Irene is now in college at Bowling Green State University. She got a full paid scholarship. Her major is in Journalism/German. She is a resident assistant in the dorm. She works for the BGS newspaper as chief reporter. I am proud of her.

I have two other daughters affected by the same syndrome as Irene. Jessica is 16 and Jacqueline is 9. Both girls are mainstreamed in parochial schools and doing well.

Writing this essay has been painful. It has brought back memories of very difficult times. I am proud of my girls. Irene has worked hard to overcome her disabilities and succeed. Who would have thought she would be able to be where she is today? My other girls are working hard, too. They have endured the jokes and ridicule of others and still stayed loving.

I am also proud of myself. I am a single mother with minimal formal education. I have started and stopped attending GED classes many many times. My kids would need me, so I would not be able to come. Yet I was able to be an advocate for my children. Irene says I have always gone against the norm by fighting to keep her out of special education classes. I helped my girls become the people they are today. I was the "village" for my special children.

-- *Sharon Sheppard-Scott*

## I Finally See

From hear to touch  
and touch to see  
From see to walk  
and run to me.

I hold your hand,  
you let it go.  
You say it's time  
for me to grow.

From love and learn  
and understand to  
know one day you  
will be men.

You try so hard  
to figure out  
just what life  
is all about.

From start to end  
it's great to see  
just what life  
has given me.

The day will come  
for me to see  
what great young men  
you've grown to be.

A kiss a hug  
is all that's left.  
It's time for you  
to do your best.

But as you walk  
away from me,  
I finally see  
my boys have grown  
just like me.

■ Sharon Harsh



## The Bloodshed of Our Children

Where does it all begin? Where does this anger come from within ourselves? I'm going back in time to a young child again in school. "Everyone hates me. They all laugh and make fun of me." I'm poor. Everyone is thinking that they are better than I am. I have no friends. Sometimes I feel like I want to die. Then that raging urge comes over me.

Even the teachers have said and done things to us kids to make us want to take revenge. We resented the popular kids. The teachers' pets were the ones with good grades and especially the ones who had everything we envied.

We were ignored and pushed to the side. We weren't wearing name-brand clothes, like Sally over there. So we formed our own little clubs and rebelled against the kids and the school.

There have been eight school shootings in the past year. Our schools have become war zones. Where will our kids' education come from? How will it be affected? I interviewed several children over the Internet who did not want to be identified. They said it would not stop there. Most kids said the same thing to me. They said the teachers didn't like some of the kids for some reason or another. Some had an older brother or sister who gave them trouble. Some weren't liked because they had learning disabilities.

My statement is "Bring back the Ten Commandments in school." Let us be able to pray. Let us work together as a team, not as prisoners of war! The bloodshed will continue, these kids have said. One student said the truth is anything you want it to be. Another student said the Commandment about "Thou shalt not kill" is only a statement.

Our kids are brought up being taught violence by seeing violence, using violence, and growing up in single-parent homes. There again the Ten Commandments would stand clear on these issues.

Living creates fear in our kids. It causes them to be disturbed. Don't lie about people. It creates insecurity, and you lose your soul.

The school system makes these kids feel like they have no ground to stand on, as if school kids are fighting a losing battle.

I had a 10-year-old child tell me he couldn't wait until he had the chance to kill a kid, that now this is the cool thing to do.

If you didn't go against the good and turn to the bad, then you would be an outcast.

If you stood up for what is right, you would be killed. This has already been proven in the Oklahoma shooting!

Our schools are no longer learning places. They are battlefields. There will be a lot more bloodshed of our children. We as parents must stop this. Also, it could be your son or daughter who will die in the next shooting. These kids have no fear. They've grown up in dysfunctional families. This is where it begins. Where will it stop? It's not about owning handguns. It's the person behind the handgun. These kids need help. They just think it's the cool thing to do.

Putting these kids in prison only makes them get the attention, and then they feel like they've won.

So I beg of you, in the next presidential election let the leader make this a service issue, a number one priority. And let us stand together as a nation and take our schools back! Consider allowing the Ten Commandments and prayer back in our schools. What else do we have to lose?

*-- Vickie Hargaves*

## Angels of Mine

My angels can't be found in  
Story books or on T.V.  
My angels carry no halos  
Nor do they bear wings.

Their spirits are high;  
Their smiles always warm.  
Eyes of an angel,  
Angel of mine.

Hearts full of love, not knowing of hate,  
If we learned from our children,  
We could all get along.

My angels are small,  
And so they are young.  
They've changed my life,  
These angels of mine.

Dedicated to my sons, Cody and Mitchell

*-- Paula Darovich*

## The Power Of Love

Since 1989, I have had the custody of my twin nephews. The kids were badly in need of help. Since I have no children, I thought it was the right thing to do to make a good home for them.

It started on a hot summer day. I went to my sister's house to find the kids home alone. To top it off they had bumps and bruises all over their bodies.

The house was nasty. . . clothes everywhere, dishes piled up that smelled like they had been there for days. The toilet had run over with water all over the floor. There were beer cans on the table, wine left in glasses in the refrigerator, no food, and no locks on the doors. The boys' clothing was not clean. They looked hungry.

I called my mother and told her the conditions of the boys and the house. She told me to bring them over to her house. So, I did. When I got there she looked them over and found what I had found. She called 241-KIDS. The authorities came over to my mother's house. At the time my sister did not know what was going on. When the lady got there she looked the boys over and found everything that we described to be true.

She took pictures and asked the boys and my sister questions. My sister refused to answer. One or two days later the authorities called and asked my mother if she could bring the boys and their mom to Human Services that day. She said, "Yes." When my sister heard that, she went into a rage talking about what she was going to do, what the authorities aren't going to do, and what my mom and I weren't going to do. A few weeks later she came to her senses and admitted that she had a drug problem and that she had to give the children up until she got help. So my mother called to ask me if I would take the boys until my sister got her life together because she wasn't able to care for them. I said yes, of course.

From that day on, it was rough, but I knew as time passed that things would get better for the three of us. When the school year began I really started having big problems with the boys. Teachers were calling everyday. Just about every week the kids were getting suspended from school because of their behavior. It was stressing me out, and I didn't know what to do. I tried whipping them, but that made matters worse. I tried punishments, and that helped for a few minutes until I started feeling sorry for them and letting them off the hook.

I was having a hard time getting anybody to help me with the boys. I called 241-KIDS and asked them what I could do. They told me to take the boys to counseling, they signed me up with a counselor. We went to a counselor two days a week. It helped for



while, but it seemed like the kids started getting worse. Finally, my mom and I came up with another plan.

The kids ended up going down south with their grandfather. I felt like that was the best thing for them. Maybe being down south with my father, going to school down there where they could get a better education would help them succeed. Perhaps having a man in their life would help.

Since the boys have been with my father they have improved very much. They get A's, B's, and C's on their lessons. Their behavior has also improved.

My mom and I are confident that we did what was best for my nephews. Maybe someday they can be reunited with their mother and be a family again.

*-- Vicki Hobbs*

## Silly Story

Holly and Gabbi were told it was night time. They know that means pajama time, time for bed. Their nicknames are Jolly Holly and Crabby Gabbi; unfortunately, at this time, Holly isn't so jolly and Gabbi is especially crabby. So we wearily climb the stairs to their room, and they jump up on their beds and bounce a few times on their mattresses. After a few minutes they settle down, Gabbi with her Lady dog and Holly with her Kelly doll. As I try to sneak quietly from the room, I hear them ask me to read them a story from their favorite book.

Their favorite book is about the sun, moon, and stars. As I sit and read to them about the man on the moon, his mother the sun and sisters the stars, the girls lay peacefully on their beds and gaze at the glow-in-the-dark moon and stars on their walls. As I am about to leave, I look back and see them sleeping and snoring, safe and sound in their beds, waiting for the dream catcher.

-- *Shannon Showalter*

## Brittany's Brace

Brittany is eight years old. She is three feet, five inches tall and weighs 39 pounds. All her friends have outgrown her, and even younger children are her size or bigger. Her younger brother, who is five, has caught up with her and is passing her by. That is part of the Klippel-Feil Syndrome. She has had open-heart surgery and reconstructive fusion surgery for her neck and collarbone.

She had to wear a halo cast that went to her lower hips. After a few weeks, one of the screws in the front of her head started slipping and moving toward her eye. She had to go back in the hospital for the doctors to put her in a body cast. The new cast covered her from the top of her head to her lower hips. There was a little hole in the top for her ponytail to hang out. There was an opening for her little face. The cast was very heavy, but she learned to get up and down by herself. She even went roller-skating. We noticed that while she was skating, every so often she would stop and reach down and hold her knees. We mentioned it to the doctor, thinking something may be wrong with her knees where they had put pins through them to hang weights from them after her last surgery.

"What, she went roller-skating!" he exclaimed. "There's nothing wrong with her knees. She was probably resting them carrying that heavy cast around." He couldn't get over her skating in that heavy cast.

The doctor kept a watch on Brittany for about a year, and then he told her she would have to go into a brace. He said she had a monstrous spine, and the brace would help to put her next surgery off until she was at least ten years old. Waiting would give her a little more time to grow. He would have to put a steel rod in her back, and once he did that, she wouldn't grow anymore. He hoped that if she wore the brace, he could put the surgery off until she was at least ten years old; but he wasn't sure he could wait until then.

The doctors have done everything they know to do to get her to grow, but she doesn't grow much at all. We are praying for a miracle.

She was fitted for her brace. Her Grandpa took her to pick it up a couple weeks later. Brittany cried when she saw the brace, and Grandpa said you could see the hurt come over her face and in her eyes. It broke his heart to see how she was hurting. She told the technician, "I didn't know this was going to involve my neck." It has a steel ring that goes around the neck and holds the neck straight. She could only move her head slightly up and down in a nod. With the brace, she couldn't even do that. The brace looks like a harness. Brittany said she was not wearing that brace.

The technician did a few things, and then he told Brittany she was free to go. The brace was lying on the bed. She got up, walked over to the bed, picked up the brace, held it in her arms, and carried it out the door.

Then they had to go to the hospital to see the doctor so he could put the brace on Brittany and get an x-ray to make sure it fit right. The brace had to go back for adjustments to be made.

Brittany is having a hard time adjusting to the brace. She can't put it on or take it off by herself because a screw closes it together at the back of the neck and one strap closes in the back. It has two straps that come from the back to close in the front.

She was afraid the kids would make fun of her, but most of them understand. She didn't want to wear it the two days a week that she takes gym because she is limited in what she can do. We were sitting at the dinner table, and she begged us not to make her wear it. She was crying, and I could not keep the tears from my own eyes. She looked so pitiful with big tears streaming down her little face that was all red and blotchy. My heart was breaking for her. So we didn't make her wear it to gym.

Brittany was finding all kinds of excuses for not wearing her brace; she said it hurt her neck and her back, so Grandpa took her to the technician to get adjustments. She told the technician it didn't hurt; she just didn't want to wear it. The technician told her if she didn't wear the brace that her doctor would put her back in a cast that she would have to wear all the time. She is supposed to be wearing the brace 23 hours a day with one hour off for her bath time.

We are praying that she will wear her brace like she is supposed to until she has to go back to the doctor and that she will start growing really fast.

Even with all this, Brittany has a wonderful sense of humor and she enjoys playing and doing things. She was playing checkers with her 11-year-old brother and he was winning, so Grandpa helped Brittany out a little and she won. She was so excited because she won, and her brother agreed to play another game of checkers with her. She was getting the board ready, and she said, "I LOVE M LIFE!"

*-- Norma J. King*

## Daddies

Sometimes the pain is just too much  
When you know you no longer  
See their face or feel their touch.  
Everyone says "daddy's little girl,"  
But what do you do when he's ripped from your world?

Daddies are there to comb your hair  
And frighten away your cares.  
Daddies are made to be strong  
And show you right from wrong.

When daddy's taken from you, what do you do?  
Then I sat and thought  
About everything my daddy taught.  
He taught me to be strong and always carry on.  
He taught me to do my best and never quit.

Even when life dealt him a raw deal,  
He stayed strong and tried to carry on.  
He did his best and never quit.  
He always held his head high and kept going on.

So, Daddy, this promise is to you.  
I will stay strong and carry on.  
I will do my best and never quit.  
I will hold my head high and keep going on.  
I know you're looking down on me  
With a smile on your face,  
A heart full of pride,  
Because you know I did not quit.

I am very lucky to have the life I have, and I am determined to  
keep improving every day of my life.

All any of us can do is keep going on and trying over and over  
any time life knocks us down.

-- *Cindy Wright*

**Marriage**  
**Happy, Loving**  
**Helping, Sharing, Caressing**  
**Unity, Joy, Boredom, Separation**  
**Disturbing, Concealing, Ignoring**  
**Sad, Hateful**  
**Divorce**

*-- Anh Phuong Nguyen*

## **My Success**

My childhood was very lonely, and my life was not stable. My dad and mom were always moving. Dad never paid the rent. He used the money on his cars. I remember not having any special holidays, like Christmas, and doing without food. I was abused on a day-to-day basis. I never had the things I needed for school. I remember how I loved school but wasn't able to do the things I needed to make my school life better.

When I was fourteen, I thought I was in love. I became a mother at fifteen and got married at sixteen. I was going through a lot just to keep my sanity, but at the same time, I wanted to become very successful in life. I wanted to help my children be successful too, but I quit school.

I had been married for a while and had ten children, when one day my 13-year-old daughter came to me and asked if I could help her with her homework. I was really struggling to help her and realized that I didn't know ANYTHING! Right then I made three commitments. I told my daughter that I wanted to buy a house, to help my children be the best that they could be, and to go back to school to get my GED.

All eight of my daughters looked at me with great big smiles and said, "Mommy, go for it! We'll see who gets the most A's." I listened to my kids and did what my heart and soul told me to do. I got my supplies together and went to the area ABLE class and enrolled.

Now I am attending class and working hard. I am really loving it because my children are bragging about their mommy doing her best. I look at all of them and say, "Thank you for the encouragement and strength."

*-- Tracy Graham*

## To Mommy's Little Angel, Rebecca

There's an angel up above.  
There's an angel God sent me to love.

There's an angel, and she's mine.  
There's an angel I'll see in time.

There's an angel God has called home  
Up to Heaven is where she has flown.

There's an angel deep in my heart.  
We're not together.  
Nor are we apart.

My little angel God gave me to love.  
He took her back and set her free.

I'll see my angel again I pray.  
I'll do my best until that day.

There's an angel my arms miss to hold.  
When I lost her,  
It took my very soul.

Although I know she's happy where she is,  
I miss her so much.  
I wish she was here for me to kiss.

*-- Amy Chandler*



## An Evening Death

Rose's husband claimed he loved her, but how can you beat and murder the one you claim to love?

Can jealousy, obsession, possessiveness drive you to the breaking point? It did for Rose's case. A victim of domestic violence, a victim of murder. It all took place on a cool evening night.

I've tried to imagine the thoughts going through her mind. I'm sure it was full of fright. For being held against your will can make you feel ill. . .was it so distressful and frightening that minutes felt like hours, hours like days? Was she feeling as though she was in a maze? No place to run; no way out even though it was a small frame house. She could peer out the window, but what could she see? Was it an ocean of red and blue lights flashing?

Could she even hear the sirens fill the evening air? Because by now men in blue were everywhere, but yet Rose's husband didn't seem to care. For in a rage and no despair he claimed her life and ended his too.

Rose was given no choice but to leave her children behind. From time to time they will cry. They will always ask that question, "Why?" Through the years they will heal, but that question, why, will always be there.

This was clearly a woman who once lived in the dark but shall now and forever live in the light. Rose is free at last to live in peace and not in fear for her life.

*-- Toni Whitt*

## **A Single Mother's Reward**

Teach your children and they will teach their children. As a mother of four young adults, I can reflect back to the values I taught them as they were growing up. I have two boys and two girls, Tony, Vanessa, Janice, and Tommie, born in that order. Although I was a young single mother, the values and ideas that I installed in my children during this time have made them prosperous and productive adults. I taught them family values; respect for others; and to be a good, dependable, hard worker.

One highlight of that time was that I never had to worry about my girls or boys "stubbing their toes," which in the old days meant getting pregnant or getting a young lady pregnant. They waited until they were older and able to accept the responsibility of being a parent.

First I would like to show some of the camaraderie of our close-knit family and the individualism of each member. Tony, my oldest, was considered the godfather because I had to work; Tony would see that the other kids would get up and ready for breakfast and school. When they got home, he made sure that they did their homework and chores. Without him I do not think it would have been as easy to work and raise my little family. His ability to take charge has carried over to his adult life. Not only did Tony take charge at home, he also excelled at school. Many times Tony got on honor roll and maintained a high grade point average. Tony still displays his value of being a responsible person.

Vanessa, my second child, was active and a little defiant, until we had a little talk. I had to show her what we called "hard love." We were discussing how her girlfriends were allowed to do as they pleased. She felt that she was old enough to do the same. We were standing by the window in her bedroom, and I told her if she thought that she old enough to do as she pleased, then she needed to be out of my house. I put her out of the window and told her to go see if the grass was greener on the other side. I assure you that it did not tak long before she realized that there is no love like a mother's love. She found out that the grass is not greener on the other side. Vanessa took a hard look at her life because of that incident. That experienc taught her to wait until she was married. She has become a young mother of two lovely and healthy kids of her own. Vanessa values her family, and it shows in the way that she handles her family.

Janice, my third child, was known as Mother Mac because she was the one who made sure that the meals were cooked and everybody ate. I remember on one occasion when I was ill she made me breakfast in bed and cooked whatever the kids wanted. She enjoyed trying new recipes. I guess you can say that the kitchen was

Janice's domain. Janice also learned from the incident between Vanessa and me. Janice says she learned to appreciate what you have and give thanks for what you receive. I never had any problems with Janice wanting to be grown or to "smell her own piss," which is another saying from the old school. This saying meant that she wasn't scared to handle the many hardships of a real adult life. Janice found that being a responsible adult enabled her to raise her little girl, Shannice. The way that she is raising Shannice shows me that I did have some influence on her life as she was growing up, and she turned into someone that any mother would love.

Tommie, my baby, was the only one of my children who you could expect to do anything weird or funny. I remember his last two days of his senior year in high school. He dressed up as we did in the sixties with all the trimmings, bell bottoms, platform shoes, and a pinstripe suit with a polka dot shirt. When Tommie was a little boy, we would miss certain items and try to find out what had happened to them. On Christmas day they would reappear as Christmas gifts from Tommie. I look back at these incidents fondly, and I can say that I am proud of Tommie. He graduated from high school and joined the Army, which helped to enrich his value of respect and dependability. He became a responsible father of his daughter Malanie.

Now I have explained the different individual personalities and how they came together to form our happy family. I am not saying that we did not have problems, but what families do not? With the love we had we were able to override any problems that arose. I feel that the love and affection that we had in our lives reflected in how my children are raising their children. Tony has two girls, Tiana and Airoena. Vanessa has Carlos Jr. and Vanessa Jr.; Janice has Shannice, and Tommie has a daughter, Malanie. As you can see, I am the proud grandmother of six wonderful grandchildren. I can say that the love and the values that I taught my children are being taught to their children. What else could a mother ask for? There is no greater love than a mother's love. We must teach our children that with good values and a parent's love and guidance, they can receive everything they desire from life. Finally, I'd like to say to all parents that it is time we thank our children for making parenthood a delightful and enjoyable experience.

*-- Sharon Cavell*

## A Son's Love

In 1997, I first learned of my father's cancer. A letter came in the mail informing me that my father had lung cancer, and the disease had spread into his liver. After reading the letter, I was very upset and in disbelief. My father always smoked for as long as I can remember, and I know that smoking can increase the chances of getting some form of cancer.

In the fall of 1997 I went to see my father who lives in Holland, and I discovered that he was doing pretty well. This was because he decided to take chemotherapy treatments right away so he could have a longer life span.

I went back to see him again in 1998, and I could see then that his cancer was taking over his life more and more. My father was fighting his cancer in a very brave way because sometimes the chemotherapy would make him very sick and uncomfortable. Without taking his chemotherapy, he would have passed away in a couple of months. As long his body would accept the treatments he could prolong his life a little longer. He was courageous dealing with the numerous side effects of his treatments. Every time the cancer became painful for him, he would get another round of chemotherapy.

During that same year, he also suffered a mild heart attack, and walking became very difficult for him after that. Then in 1999, he became more and more ill and also bedridden. A few months later, I went to see him again and I could see right away that he wasn't doing very well. The cancer had now spread into his brain, and he could only breathe with the help of oxygen. Each day I was there, he became weaker and weaker, but luckily, I could still talk to him because his mind was still sharp.

Then on the last evening before I was to go home, my father and I had a very comforting and warm conversation. Less than two hours later, he passed away. I was glad that I was able to be with him during his last days on earth and that I could close this chapter in a warm and proper way.

Goodbye, Dad. May your soul rest in peace.

-- *Bart Rethmeier*

## Su Ah and Hyun Ah

Beautiful daughters  
Both very special  
Best friends to each other but with  
Very different personalities.  
The older one enjoys playing the piano  
While the younger one finds gymnastics fun.  
The younger one is always in a hurry  
And therefore she can be very messy.  
Su Ah holds her feelings into herself.  
While Hyun Ah is very sensitive, loving, and giving.  
Both are good to me  
And hold a special place in my heart.

-- *Kum Sun Kim*

## Innocence Taken

“Come here baby girl, let me see you smile.  
Sit on my lap for a little while.  
You are so special to me.  
Let me touch, let me see.”  
He touched, he took my innocence.  
“Nobody has to know.  
I love you; I told you so.  
They wouldn’t understand how I feel.  
Be a good little girl; it’s no big deal.”  
I feel so dirty, I don’t know why.  
This bad feeling I can’t deny.  
He kept it a secret, he took my faith.  
I was a victim of this bliss.  
My dignity or worth doesn’t exist.  
The day came when he died.  
I never even once cried.  
My mother wanted me to say goodbye.  
I always wondered when he would die.  
He’s been gone for years; the pain is still here.  
But Jesus whispers in my ear,  
I dealt with him.

-- Regina Mulkey

## An Unsolved Fire

On Monday, February 13, 1989, I stood in the front yard of the house where I grew up and watched it burn down. I've never felt so helpless, ever. In the 24 years of my life, I had never seen my father cry, but he did that day. There was a sadness in his eyes that I'll never forget. Imagine losing everything you've worked for in a matter of minutes.

When the fire was finally out and we were allowed to go inside, what we saw was unbelievable. There were no walls left separating my two brothers' rooms and the bathroom. My oldest brother, Larry, had no closet left. The only clothing he had to wear was the work uniform that he had on. The front part of the house looked better. The walls were still standing, but as we took a closer look, we knew that all of my family's furniture and clothes were damaged with smoke and water.

My family could no longer stay in their home until it was rebuilt. My mother was afraid that the same thing would happen again. The firefighters could not determine the cause of the fire. They wrote, "Cause Unknown." My father took a loss on that house because he had never increased his fire insurance over the years.

My mom, dad, and my two brothers, Larry and Darrell, had to split up for a month. My mom and dad decided to stay with me, and my brothers chose to stay with Jean, a dear friend of Larry's. My mother was devastated. She was in the habit of fixing supper every night for her household. She had been doing this all of her life. So every morning when my husband and I went to work, we took Mom to Jean's house so she could cook for everybody at the same time. This pleased her a great deal and gave her some relief. She never said, but I knew she was counting the days until she could have her own house again.

My father was totally heartbroken. The morning after the fire, I knocked on the door to get him up for work. He told me to come in, so I did. He was sitting on the edge of the bed with the blankest look on his face. He was at a loss for words. Only tears rolled down his face. I went over to him and hugged and kissed him and told him that I loved him. I didn't know what to say or do. I had never been so speechless. The pain that my father suffered reminded me of a death. Nobody really knows the disappointment of a fire unless they experience it themselves. It's a hard thing to get past. I don't know if my father has ever gotten completely over it yet.

I went with my family to go through their belongings and to salvage what they could. What a nightmare that was! Just looking at the damage was enough for us to know that had that fire happened at night, my brothers probably wouldn't have survived, and maybe not

my parents. This whole experience gave us a new respect for fire that we've never had before.

I spent the biggest part of my time with Larry. His room was the most damaged. He didn't have much left. But he was so grateful for what we did find. He was like a child at Christmas time. He always made the best of every situation, that brother of mine. What was really neat was his Bible was left untouched. The other books right next to it were destroyed. But the Bible was as good as new. No that's incredible!

A month after the fire, my father bought another house, and he went to the furniture store and bought a whole house full of new things. He also bought my brothers a new stereo to replace the one they both lost in the fire. Now that was indeed a special surprise! My sister discovered that she was pregnant with the first grandchild. That helped our family get past this terrible tragedy a little more easily. Slowly things started getting back to normal again. But I will never forget that awful day, and the events that took place.

**Note:** In April 1998 at about 10:00 p.m., I finished the draft for this story. I was so proud that I wanted to share it with my brother Larry, whom I was very close to. I was so excited that I almost got my two children out of bed to go over to his house. (I didn't have a phone and I lived alone with my children.) But I didn't go; I thought I was being silly. I decided to wait until the next day. As I lay in bed, I could feel an urge, almost like a force, to go to my brother, but I didn't. It all seemed too crazy. The next day though, it was too late. You see, on April 21, 1998, sometime between 10:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m., my brother Larry Delph was murdered behind his house. Maybe I could have stopped him from being killed and maybe not. But it would have meant a lot to me to have been there that night. So the next time, if I ever have such a strong pull, no matter how stupid it may seem, I'm going to follow it. And I hope that you, the reader, will also.

*-- Karen S. Smith*