

Chapter 1 — Stuff Like This

Spring 1992

*‘Although the world is full of suffering,
it is also full of the overcoming of it.’*

- Helen Keller

‘Ohh no you don’t!’ I quickly swiped the Big Bird rattle before it hit the floor.

Mia giggled like crazy. This was her favorite game. Drop-the-toy-and-make-the-crazy-lady-pick-it-up. Swinging her legs frantically, she bounced in her baby seat. Drool bubbles fizzing out between her lips.

‘Vvzzssss...mmom-mom-momm!’

Tripping over a purple dinosaur, I managed to answer the phone on the second ring while spinning around with wide eyes and open mouth to keep Mia’s attention. The bouncing started up again with a toothless grin.

‘Hi Mom! You should see- ...what’s wrong? You soundok, sure.’

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That was when my light flipped dark, my up went down...my right turned wrong.

My daughter Mia was about five months old when both my Mother and Father were diagnosed with cancer. Mom first... in her breast and within two weeks, Dad... in his throat. I could not

imagine having anything worse happen. I didn't know how to feel. I was scared. I was angry. My parents weren't supposed to die. They slayed dragons and scared away the Bogey Man. They were invincible...and they would be around forever. I would *never* have to worry about stuff like this. These are some of the lies I had been telling myself since I was little, to help me sleep at night. And now, here I was, shaken awake with the fact that I might lose both of them at once. How could this be happening?

The entire summer of 1992, my Mom and Dad were undergoing their treatments. Mom was able to have her treatments in the hospital in Moncton, where she lived. Dad had to travel to Saint John (an hour away from where we lived) for his. He came home on the weekends to his house, next door to us. My parents had been living apart since I was 12 years old.



'Boy, you would think I'd be *used* to being flat-chested by now. But this is ridiculous!' She stood sideways in front of the mirror with her head tilted in the opposite direction and a most disappointed slant to her face. She took in a deep breath and let it out. I knew she was trying to keep things light, but wasn't sure if I should laugh. So I said nothing.

'Here is your tea, Mom' as the steaming mug clicked down onto the table. Mom had to lose one of her breasts. And even though she had always been the first to admit that she was flat-chested and make jokes about it, it truly was a huge slice of her spirit that disappeared with it. Not long after chemotherapy began, her hair started to fall out. Before we knew it, there were clumps of hair just giving up and letting go. She couldn't bring herself to brush it, but wanted to just get it all out at once and get it over with.

'Honey...?'

'Yes Mom...?'

She turned her back on the mirror and held out her hand to me, passing the hair brush.

‘Sure!’ I, being naïve and never once thinking that she wouldn’t survive, had no problem brushing it for her.

‘Thank you Sweetheart. I’m proud of you. You’re very strong’ ...Stronger than she could be right then. That last part came from her eyes, not her mouth.

Mom started learning about holistic medicine and whole foods. She was seeing a Naturopath. Of course when you know how to heal your body and what to avoid, you want to share it with those you love. So I learned also. The more I learned, the less faith I had in western medicine. From that time forward, if anyone in my family or myself was sick, we initially took care of it ourselves. I learned when our bodies are free of obstructions, such as poisons, toxins and the like, they *will* heal themselves. Prescription drugs are only remotely considered as a last resort in our home. I read everything I could get my hands on. I spoke with other like-minded people. And for the first time I started to feel some sort of hope. That I really could take control of my life and my health. I was infuriated to learn that medical doctors for the most part wouldn’t even accept that natural medicines and treatments work. If they can’t make any money then they turn their backs on it.



My husband Brant, Mia and I lived next door to my Father and my ten year old brother Gregor. For the three months Dad would be undergoing his radiation treatments, we were to take care of Gregor. Since Dad’s house was bigger, we moved our lives up there from Sunday nights till Friday nights when he got home. When Dad came home on the weekends, we usually left to go and visit my Mom. She lived in a city two hours away. This made it hard for us to spend any amount of time with my Dad. I didn’t realize until the summer was over that Dad was really hurt

that we never went to Saint John to visit him. Since he came home on the weekends it never occurred to me to go and visit him. Once I was made aware of it, it really bothered me. We only had one car and Brant always took it to work. He worked all week while Dad was in Saint John. The only time we had to go and visit Mom was on the weekends and that's when Dad came home. So I guess I never thought of it. But I can understand now how it must have made him feel.

'Don't worry too much about it. No one else came either.'

'What do you mean? *No one?*'

'Just what I said. Everyone else was too busy for the likes of me.'

There were eight of us altogether. Four boys, four girls. The five oldest were from Dad's first marriage. Dale, Ron, Samuel, Ellie and Maddie. Then there were Heather and I from his second marriage. And lastly, Gregor...from no marriage at all.

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'Dear Heather,

June 14, 1993

I can't believe I'm sitting here trying to think of something to say to my own sister. I've been trying to write this letter for three days. It's been so long since I've talked with you that I don't even know what to say.

I hope you know how happy you've made Mom with your phone call. She sounds a lot better now.

You have no idea what we have been through this past year and a half. But we have no idea what you've been going through either.

I just wish I understood what happened...'

Just one year earlier, Heather and I had been quite close. She was a bridesmaid in my wedding. We had spoken on the phone every day. She had been in the hospital with me when Mia was born. But then something happened. I'm not sure what.

And then she was gone.

She wasn't here when Mom and Dad got sick. She wasn't even speaking to any of us. I felt so alone. I thought if I could write to her, reach out somehow...maybe she would come back.

Maybe she would be my sister again.

'...When we were younger, you left home before we had a chance to become friends. But when you came home four years ago, or was it three? We had quite a few communication problems because we were strangers. But over the last three years we were getting past those problems and after our weddings I felt we were finally getting to be sisters. Maybe even friends. We never really had the chance before. I thought you felt the same way. I was sure you did....'