Hi Brother,                                      August 22, 2017

Crazy how time works. Another year gone since I have hugged your neck. After almost a decade, I can still see how your blue eyes lit up when your nephew or one of your nieces made you laugh. I can still hear the sound of your deep, southern drawl as you talked about your newest car project or your latest camping adventure. I can still see what you looked like when you walked into a room—your slow gait, your tall, lean body towering over us all as you gave a round of hugs then found a place to sit off to the side. That’s where you felt most comfortable, isn’t it? Off to the side, out of the spotlight?

I realize you learned to do that at an early age because so much of your life you were unwillingly in the spotlight. Not the kind of spotlight that made you want to be your best though. It was more like an interrogating light. One that made you feel inadequate and broken.

Since you were a little boy you tried all sorts of ways to avoid the attention that made you doubt your self-worth. As your little sister, I observed the troubles you faced, I saw the obstacles you encountered, and I felt your frustration and anger. I wanted to help, but we were at the mercy of the adults in charge. The tools and strategies employed to “fix you” were woefully inadequate because they were requiring you to change, not the environments you were growing up in.

As you aged, the light just became laser focused and more blinding, crippling you in a sense. Eventually you believed the messages the world was sending you: You are broken. You are difficult. You are making our lives hard. Instead of receiving patient teachers you received punishment. Instead of receiving compassionate redirection you received rejection. Instead of receiving an opportunity to express yourself, you received expulsion. Along the way your heart hardened, but you continued to survive, until you couldn’t anymore.

What makes your story even more tragic is how often your cries for help were ignored or overlooked by those who could make a difference. Your “bad behavior” was viewed as an annoyance not as a signal that something deeper was going on. Your quick-tempered response to the slightest provocation was dismissed as a personality flaw not as a sign that you didn’t have appropriate coping strategies. Your drug and alcohol use were viewed as rebellious acts not as a balm to your pain and suffering. Our Mom sure did try to help you. She threw her heart and soul into loving you, but love alone could not undo all that had been done.

**Continued**
My biggest wish was that you would have lived long enough to come full circle—to experience the exhilaration of not only addressing and removing the mental and emotional obstacles that immobilized you, but to realize you were injured and that help was available and healing was possible.

I want you to know I fully understand that you could not make this transformation alone. I wish we knew more about the resources and assistance available, the support and care needed to support your mind and body. I have come to terms with what is, but that doesn’t mean I have to stop thinking about what could have been. I want people to talk about suicide no matter how uncomfortable it can be. My wish for your transformation may not have been fulfilled, but because of your life and death I have been transformed. Thank you for giving me the courage to say difficult things and for helping me encourage others to treat children in a more compassionate way from the start.

Yesterday marked nine years since you decided to leave it all behind. On the anniversary of your death, millions of Americans were collectively looking toward the sky to witness the most amazing cosmic event: a total solar eclipse. As I stood in the path of totality with family and friends, watching the brilliant sun grow dimmer and dimmer, the light around us fading into darkness, I was stricken with awe; not just by the event itself, but of the possibility of turning all the attention on the eclipse of the sun to the lives eclipsed by suicide.

Can you imagine the change we would see if all those same people turned their attention to suicide prevention?

Can you imagine how drastically different the lonely or downtrodden would feel if they suddenly understood that they were not alone in this?

Can you imagine the decrease in suffering if we turned our attention towards treating children better so they don’t grow into lost and hurt adults to begin with?

I can.

You are forever in my heart,

Sis

“Not every story has a happy ending...but the discoveries of science, the teachings of the heart, and the revelations of the soul all assure us that no human being is ever beyond redemption. The possibility of renewal exists so long as life exists. How to support that possibility in others and in ourselves is the ultimate question.” -Dr. Gabor Maté