

Cousin Esther

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My cousin passed away ten days before I announced my wedding vows to my wife. The cause of her death was a *cerebral hemorrhage*, which occurred while bike riding in the central Colorado Rockies. She was buried in El Paso, but in my heart she lives among the trees of the western slope of the *continental divide*.

I got to know my cousin pretty well through letters we had been sending each other since the early 80's. She was constantly moving from Texas, to New Mexico, to Colorado. My cousin chose to live in Fraser Colorado, a small which is known as the "ice box" of the North American Continent. Cabin fever runs *rapid* in this part of the country as it claims lives every winter.

In the summer of 1986, I visited my cousin Esther. It was a treat to see my cousin in the environment she *adored* the most. That summer we hiked the local mountain peaks and shared the sounds of the high winds across the timberline. She once said that the dead are buried in the ground and their spirits live in the trees. I always liked that statement because I can never look at a tree without thinking about my cousin Esther.

I was very sad that my cousin had died. I flew to El Paso and had the honor of being a *pallbearer* at her funeral. As I laid my cousin to rest, tears came down because I knew El Paso was not known for beautiful trees.

She died on July 2nd, 1989. A few days later I stood at the altar celebrating the birth of my new family. The value of family became *apparent*. My cousin was the only one in my family to have received anything higher than a high school diploma little did I know that I would be following in her footsteps. She was a person my family most *admired* for being *ambitious* in her goals but I always wondered why she chose to live in the *secluded* town like Fraser, Colorado. I would never forget my Tio Juan's *sincere* caring statement, "Mijo, cuidate, no estudies mucho por que asi se murio tu prima, de la cabeza! Estudio mucho y su cabeza se exploto" (Son, take care of yourself, don't study too much because that is how your cousin died. She studied too much and her head exploded.) I love my family for their humor. I realized then that it is important to face death without fearing it.

I have always wondered about life after death. One can go on and on, but one thing is for sure, I am going to die and what would be left are memories, especially the memories you leave behind.

Just recently my wife and I started payments on a burial *plot*. I felt very strange choosing a place where my body will *decay* into bones. Naturally, the first question to the salesman was, “Where are the nearest trees?” I got what I asked for, lot 2319, Rosehills Lawn: Spring Terrace, close to an oak tree.