

1. The First Day

“When I was four years I used to tell you that I came from Jupiter, and it made me happy that you not only believed me, but asked me for details and seemed truly interested. It was hard to describe in the limited language of a four year-old, but I can explain it to you now. I was aware of having another home and another family somewhere far away. The memory faded as I got older, but when I got sick and my body began to fail, I could see visions of that home again. It pulled me closer and closer, and I knew I had to release my body in order to get back there, because it’s the real home where we all come from and where we all really live. This is the most important thing that we in Heaven are trying to teach ... how to release the illusions, negativities and beliefs of the body in order to be open to the truths of Heaven.”

Danny, ten days after his death

I’ve been instructed to start telling the story beginning with the day of Danny’s death, because that is exactly where the story begins. But I’m actually going to start a few days earlier, on the day when I began to feel myself becoming open in a way I had never experienced or expected.

On this day things started to flow easily and effortlessly, and the flow encompassed everything around me, including the presence and placement of people and events, a sense of being and doing exactly what I was supposed to be and do, and the knowledge that I would soon be permanently, magnificently changed.

This subtle and slow-growing shift in awareness actually began about three months before Danny made his final journey out of his body, when he cleverly orchestrated a “dress rehearsal” to prepare us for his impending transition. The details don’t matter other than to say that he was in the hospital with dehydration and pneumonia, and during this time I created sacred space around him in every way I knew how. He couldn’t tell me in words, but I knew his intention was to allow himself to be patched up by doctors just this one time, just long enough to get us used to the idea that his body was no longer viable and he was ready to leave it. In the weeks that followed he led me on a journey of gratitude and acceptance, in which both of us came to embrace his death with joy and relief.

The week he was in the hospital I had a psychic reading with my dear friend Rebecca Covington, a gifted medium who channels a group of non-physical entities known as “Elishevaa.” I’d been having readings with Rebecca since 1998, and over the years these readings have not only guided me, they educated and primed me for the emergence of my own abilities in this area. In this particular reading Elishevaa told me that my role in the process of Danny’s death was to act as a midwife, assisting him with his birth into the next world, and that this role was pristine and elevated, to be protected and revered at all times. Elishevaa’s exact words were:

“Danny does not wish to exist in a netherworld imprisoned in his body, and he feels that his work is done. But he does not want to cause you pain, and feels he is the only joy in your life. Do not become overly emotional when with him, for it burdens him in ways he cannot express, but be honest, as you have, that you will be sad, but eventually fine, and how you look forward to him laughing and running and playing and talking, and having him eventually communicating through you and what wonderful things you’ll talk about. For now you will be bathed in light and allow nothing else into your existence or awareness for the sake of Danny. Nothing else will exist for you. The ritual of transition begins and it is up to you to bring only light and peace into the circle of honor here. As though no two people exist in the world except for you and Danny—no different than childbirth.”

That meant not only creating peaceful space for Danny, but also doing the same for myself by keeping my heart both protected and open at the same time, which was no small task. I knew I needed to release as much fear, doubt, anger and negativity as possible, so along with my usual meditation practices, I worked on disengaging from the intense strife in my marriage. With Danny’s death approaching, the stress levels were higher than usual and the pain and grief I’d been anticipating for so long were beginning to surface. I was fearful about how this added burden would affect the volatile interactions which had been the hallmark of my relationship with my husband during our entire 9 years together.

My husband Jack was not the kind of person who could deal with strong emotions, and his pattern was to keep his feelings inside until they’d inevitably break through in bursts of irrational anger, odd behaviors and occasional physical violence. I didn’t want Danny to spend his last months on earth experiencing this kind of the turmoil, so in order to maintain a semblance of peace, I decided to withdraw completely from Jack and keep my thoughts, needs and concerns about Danny to myself in an attempt to avoid as much conflict as possible. This wasn’t difficult to do, since Jack and I had already been sleeping separately for most of the past year, and

I’d long since stopped trying to communicate with him about anything more sensitive than mundane household business. I knew that proximity to him would lead to angry outbursts and hurtful words, and I vowed that Danny would never have to witness such things again.

Danny’s transition had indeed begun, and among other things, I struggled with guilt, wondering if he’d decided to die merely to escape the chaos and sadness in our home. When Rebecca asked Elishevaa about this for me, they gave me a metaphysical slap on the wrist for thinking that anybody could influence another’s choice about when or why to die.

I spent Danny’s last few weeks reminiscing with him about our life together and the beautiful times we’d shared, while showing him pictures in our family photo albums (he had a hard time focusing on the pictures because as I learned later, his eyes were drying out from dehydration and he could not see very well). I also spent a lot of time lying next to him in his bed, whispering to him about the beauty of “Heaven” as I perceive it. I told him how he’d meet up with members of his soul family ... friends and loved ones he’d forgotten during this incarnation

but would remember with great love the instant he saw them. And I assured him that I would be there too, because we're capable of vibrating in more than one dimension simultaneously, and though I'd still be in a physical body on earth, we would be together on the other side at the same time.

Little did I know how true that would turn out to be.

I must preface this next section by saying that Danny was not my biological child. He was adopted at birth by me and my previous husband, Jim. His birth mother was a 26 year-old girl named Erika Snowden, who had a beautiful open soul and an extraordinary set of parents named Paula and Frank. Via an introduction through a mutual friend, Jim and I met Erika, Paula and Frank during Erika's seventh month of pregnancy. It was love at first sight for all of us, and we began to formulate a spiritual and legal agreement for the adoption of Erika's baby boy. The name she had chosen for him was *Morgan Snowden*, a beautiful Celtic name that not only reflected her heritage, but also reflected a culture to which I'd always been inexplicably drawn. We changed his name when we adopted him of course, but I've since added "Snowden" to it as a way to honor Erika for giving me the greatest gift I've ever received. We supported her during her pregnancy and all of us were in the delivery room with her during Danny's birth. We stayed in touch for several years afterwards, recognizing the importance of our bond as a soul family, but eventually we lost track of her.

Erika's mother Paula —Danny's biological grandmother—died at age 46 from a surgical complication two years after Danny was born. She was in a coma for several days before she died, and when I went to visit her in the hospital I brought one of Danny's baby blanket with me. You know the type ... the tiny, white, waffle-textured ones. When I laid it on Paula's stomach, to the amazement of everybody in the room, she grabbed it with her hand and held it tight. Later than night, around 11 pm, two year-old Danny woke up crying and terrified, and it took me hours to comfort him. He had been an extraordinary infant who'd started sleeping through the night at five weeks old, and always slept easily and peacefully. But on this night he woke up nearly hysterical, and the next morning I learned that Paula had died at 11 pm. I knew without a doubt that she'd done a "fly by" to visit him. Their special connection was now established.

Fast-forward 14 years and Danny is now five days away from his own death. I had not thought of Paula much over the years, but when I showed Danny her picture in the photo album, her presence filled the room. As it turned out, she was preparing to do another fly by. Paula's visitations started earlier that day when I got a call from an acquaintance inviting me to a chanting group she was hosting that evening. I really didn't want to go, I was never interested in chanting and had never done it before, so I told her that my child was sick and I couldn't leave him. Literally 30 seconds after I hung up the phone, Lisa, one of Danny's hired in-home aides, called and said, "I can come by and stay with Dan for a while today if you'd like to get out and go somewhere."

So I knew I was supposed to go to this chanting thing.

I arrived there and met a room full of people I'd never seen before,

and a man named John led us in several Buddhist chants for healing, compassion and heart-opening. I'd never chanted before, and found it distracting, because when I meditate I *want* to listen to the cosmic debris in my mind. That's where I hear the voices of my guides, and chanting drowns it out, which may be the goal for many people, but not for me.

So I decided to stop chanting and just listen to the others, when to my delight I found that their sounds created a vibration which helped me open myself up as a conduit to whatever messages might be trying to come through. And sure enough, Paula showed up and started talking to me. She said that she was coming to take Danny home (when the group was chanting "Om" it sounded like "home") and that she, Erika and I were a trinity of goddess/mother energy, all three having shepherded Danny through this remarkable incarnation of his.

While I was basking in Paula's beautiful light, the chanting ended and John put a CD on, telling us to listen to the song and meditate on goddess energy (there are truly no coincidences). He played the most beautiful recording of Ave Maria that I'd ever heard, and all through the song Paula's presence filled me with peace. I asked her why she hadn't shown up until now, and she said because she wasn't needed until now. She was specifically there to be a guide for Danny's death.

LIFE ENDS ... AND BEGINS

Five days later Danny died. He was lying in his bed on a beautiful memorial quilt that a group of friends had created together for exactly this purpose. My dear friend Lee Green, the bereavement specialist at our hospice agency, called it his "journey blanket." It is now mine also, because I wrap myself in its radiant energy whenever I need to feel Danny physically close to me.

On that morning and all through the previous night, Danny slept deeply, his lungs emitting a gurgling sound with each breath. He'd been sleeping curled up on his side all night, and when our hospice nurse, Jim, came for his morning visit, he rolled Danny onto his back to look into his eyes and check his vital signs. Danny was breathing and gurgling peacefully, but his eyes were doing something I'd never seen before.

They were open and looking up at the ceiling, not directly above him, but a few inches behind him, staring at something unseen to the rest of us. Jim recognized this look and declared that Danny was in the process of "separating" and was most likely unaware of anything going on around him. Jim said he'd probably live no more than 24 hours. That look in Danny's eyes still haunts me and fascinates me (I have since learned that this look is common in dying people), and sometimes when I meditate I focus my eyes in the same way, trying to see what Danny was seeing.

I had less than 24 hours left to comfort my sweet boy, to feel the final beats of his heart and to lay my head next to his so I could feel the last of his warm breaths on my cheek. I scrambled around all morning taking care of little household tasks, frantically trying to get things done so I could spend some quiet time lying by his side. All my friends and family

members knew Danny was dying and had nothing but the best intentions, but the constantly ringing phone and the steady stream of people coming to the door drove me crazy. There were a thousand distractions and fires to put out before I could settle down and spend some time with Danny. I even spent an hour finishing up some work for a client because I knew I wouldn't be able to work during the coming week. Finally things got quiet and I went in to be with Danny.

"Hi baby, I'm here now," I said. "I'm sorry I was so busy all morning, but I'm here now."

I stroked his hair, moistened his lips with a glycerin swab and thought about putting some music on but changed my mind, thinking that he was probably already hearing the music of the spheres.

And that's when I realized for the first time since the previous day that I was *not* hearing the gurgling sound. I must have been there tending to him for a full minute before I noticed that he was no longer breathing.

Danny did what many people do. He waited until I was busy elsewhere to finalize his transition. As I've been taught by many who are more experienced at this than I, my presence close to him would have held him here. Although I knew this intellectually, I felt terrible that I didn't spend those last hours by his side. How could I have thought it was more important to answer the phone and to finish up some work for a client? Later that night I said to my friend Edith, a recent widow, "This wasn't the way I wanted it to be." And she said, "It was the way *he* wanted it to be." It wasn't until weeks later that I understood that Paula and many other guides were with him during those hours, and that he most certainly did not die alone. Nobody ever does.

Jack's daughter Nicole, who is the same age as Danny and had grown up with him since age seven, loved him deeply, and came to stay with us during Danny's last days. When we realized Danny had died, Nicole and I held each other and cried while Jack, who's got some medical training, checked Danny's pupil responses and other indicators trying to figure out how long he'd been "gone." We determined that it had happened only in the last five minutes, as we retraced our steps leading up to that moment.

Jack, Nicole and I lay on the bed cuddled up with Danny's body for a long time. We dressed him in a special shirt Jack had made several months earlier, which had the handicapped logo on it with the words "Life Rolls On." We laid flowers on his chest and all around him. Then I shooed everyone away so I could spend some time alone with him. I held him closer than I'd been able to hold him in a long time, because his cramped, disabled body had been so difficult to handle, and now it was pliant and relaxed. I held him and cried, and asked him to show me a picture of what it was like wherever he was located at that moment.

And then my crying turned to giggling, because he showed me an image of himself wearing jeans with the cuffs rolled up and a white t-shirt, like James Dean. He was standing in (on?) water and kicking his legs out in front of him and laughing. He was ecstatic! And I was happy too. About an hour later, Amy and Lisa, our two in-home aides who also worked in Danny's classroom at school (I hesitate to call them aides because they are part of the family and more like sisters) showed up, and

the four of us women, Amy, Lisa, Nicole and I, spent the rest of the time cuddling with Danny, petting him, talking, laughing and crying. At one point one of us was sitting on each corner of the bed, each caressing a hand or a foot, and it seemed quite humorous, dividing Danny's extremities like that. None of us could stop touching him. And it was funny, because it didn't look much different than a typical day in Danny's life, with him lying on his bed surrounded by adoring females holding his hands and massaging his feet. The only difference was that Sponge Bob wasn't on the TV and Danny wasn't in his body.

We kept him there with us for *five hours* before calling the funeral home to take his body away. I'd arranged to donate his brain to research, and just before the attendants pulled the blanket up over his face, I held his head in my hands and said a prayer that his brain would help find a cure for this dreadful disease.

We stood shell-shocked in the front yard and watched them drive away. It was about 6 pm, and we spent the rest of the evening sitting in the living room telling stories about Danny, so bonded by this experience and so comforted by each other's presence that nobody wanted to leave the room. There was food in the kitchen but nobody wanted to separate from the group long enough to go in there and get any. Edith showed up a bit later and joined our little circle, perfect and unbroken until 11 pm. Nobody wanted to go home.

I slept in Danny's bed that night, on his journey blanket, and Jack joined me there at some point during the night. There was a peaceful energy in Danny's room, but the rest of the house felt cold and lifeless. In the morning I called Rebecca, asking her to contact Elishevaa for news of Danny's journey.

They said:

"Loved ones, as difficult as it is to celebrate, it truly is a time of celebration! It is as though one has been jailed unfairly and the DNA has been found to belong to another, and he has been freed! He can dance and laugh and shout and feel and he is delighting in this glorious new body! He is saying, "Do not be sad! You cannot realize how soon we will be together again!" And it is true the picture that you have in your mind—he gave it to you as a gift, the 'James Dean' picture, because it is to make you laugh and give you joy and a sight of truth! He is bathed in light, and he is still very close and will stay close for a time, before making a journey to the Hall of Records and a time of review and study. He will spend time comforting you and others, and 'looking over' his life from the earth perspective. Allow yourself this time to talk to him and spend time in his presence, and share in his joy. But dear sister, also allow yourself a time to grieve, and do not be hard on yourself for doing so."

DANNY SPEAKS (AND TRIES ON SHOES)

The next day I was lying on Dan's bed wrapped in his journey blanket when to my astonishment, he spoke to me and showed me another image of himself. This time he had long legs as if he was walking on stilts like one of those circus clowns that dresses up as Uncle Sam, and

he was walking in shallow water again, kicking his legs up and splashing around. He looked to be very mature, a few years older than his own age, and he was still wearing those jeans, but this time he was also wearing the LIFE ROLLS ON shirt.

I couldn't believe how lucky I was to have actually seen him twice! I asked, "Is that you? Can you talk to me?"

And he started talking in a voice that was different than the voice he had here before he'd lost the ability to speak. It was an older voice, and he said, "Yes, you are hearing me."

And of course my first thought, so typically human, was to fear that I'd lose him, so I said, "Will this stay? Will you stay with me?"

He said, "You will hear me this easily most of the time, when you can clear the conduit. You've been studying and working and doing much to prepare yourself, and now that you have the techniques for calming and receiving, I will come to you whenever you do the steps to take the noise and clutter out of the way. This is one way I can help you remove some of the agitation in your life, because you'll have a motivation for keeping it away."

I was pulled back to earth by thoughts of calling Rebecca to ask Elishevaa if what I had just seen and heard was real. Danny must have heard that thought, because he laughed and said, "I know you need validation, so I'll wait right here while you check in with Rebecca."

This what Elishevaa said:

"We recommend that you begin a journal, or free-flowing thoughts with no attention to order, beginning now. Your thoughts and reflections of the last few weeks especially, along with your experiences of Danny's new experiences now, will be helpful to many others in the future. Your future is beginning NOW. Your grieving process will not be 'normal' (what about your life has ever been normal? You won't be starting "normal" now loved one), and your process, along with the connection and descriptions of Danny's process, will be unusual and wonderful for others to experience eventually as well.

Because the visions, lessons, and thoughts will come sometimes as a flood, other times as quick revelations, you will never remember them all if you do not start an accounting now. And you will regret losing them if you think you will write them down later. It will also be part of your healing to write them. Yes, we validate all that you are hearing, seeing, you will even be smelling. You will have many sensory experiences as he 'hangs around' and enjoys being, like Pinocchio, a 'real boy' for a while. And even when he does begin his studies so to speak, he will be 'on call' on a very simple duality, such as we are. But this very visceral experience will be highly personal and last for quite some time, do not worry about losing it, for it has only begun
Terri Daniel with Danny Mandell

Danny is very, very excited. There is just no other way to describe it. He is goofing around with the size of his legs, kind of like the old Stretch Armstrong toys. He can do anything he wants, and it's an absolute delight, and there is no one he would rather share this with than you. We also suggest that you cut and paste our words with the words of your reflections and the words of Danny so that you do

not forget the validation of Heaven, Read and re-read what we have said, to help you as you mold and confirm and integrate the many levels of information that are coming to you at once."

In the three days that followed, strange and comical things started to happen. I kept seeing Danny as a circus clown on stilts, and then one day I got an email from my friend Melissa, who said, "Danny is with some of my favorite people, including my wonderful daddy who as a boy was an acrobat in the circus. He just taught Danny how to do a cartwheel ... what adventures they will have together!"

Melissa knew nothing about my circus clown vision. And neither did Edith, who later in the week invited me to attend a lecture with her on the topic of, believe it or not, P.T. Barnum.

And just to drive the point home (because Danny, the guides and angels were working hard to convince me that this was real), Danny helped find a lost cat. I was on the phone with my friend Mary, telling her about my contact with Danny, and she said, half kidding, "ask him if he can find my neighbor's cat. We've been searching for it all day." So I hung up the phone, concentrated for a minute, and saw a vision of Danny standing there with our own cat, Maui. The vision lasted for only a split second, but five minutes later Mary called me back to say that the cat had just shown up at the neighbor's door!

The next day I was at the airport waiting for the arrival of my mother and my lifelong friend Shelley, both of whom had flown in to help with the memorial service and the sad, surreal tasks that follow the death of a loved one. I was in the airport restroom, sitting on the toilet, and decided to call for Dan to visit me. He showed up immediately in front of me, and this time, with his long legs, he was wearing a pair of white sneakers.

It had been a couple of years since he'd worn anything but socks because his feet had become too twisted and contorted for shoes. He was now showing me a picture of himself trying on different types of shoes, reveling in his newfound ability to wear them.

Mom and Shelley arrived and I expected them to be distraught, but to my surprise they weren't. I'm sure it was because they were feeding off of my energy, and I was on a high. It was a type of ecstasy, and I think it was because I was feeling Danny's ecstasy at being freed from his body. I wondered why I wasn't paralyzed with grief, why I was able to laugh and talk and enjoy my family and have the presence of mind to organize his memorial service and to finalize a slide presentation about Danny's life that I'd planned to show at the memorial. Shouldn't I be disconsolate and disheveled, unable to function? My face should have been red and swollen from crying, but I hadn't actually cried that much, and when I looked in the mirror I was shocked at how good I looked. Tired, yes, but I'd been looking tired for a long time. My face looked calmer than I'd seen it in years. Was this normal? Was I in denial? What *should* I have been feeling? Elishevaa had said that my grieving process would not be "normal." Is this what they meant?

During the years of Danny's disability I often described our relationship as being like the relationship between E.T. and Elliott from the movie "E.T." Elliott and his beloved E.T. were telepathically connected,

feeling the same feelings and sharing the same thoughts, but eventually they had to separate. Danny and I were connected like that, but we never separated, and we most certainly are not separated now. I knew in my heart and in every cell of my body that I was *not* in denial, that I was not irrational or crazy with grief. I knew that Danny was with me and that he would guide me through this.

The next few days were probably typical of what people do when someone dies, though I can't say for sure because Danny was the first person close to me who'd ever died. My mother said that we should not hesitate to remove his clothes and belongings from his room, because the longer we waited the harder it would be to face. I agreed, and the process of going through his things, separating them into different boxes for Goodwill, for friends, etc., was not as painful as I'd imagined it would be. I felt he was standing right next to me the whole time, choosing which items would go where. Now and then a particular item would trigger a flood of tears, but it was cleansing, and an important part of the process. The pain was not an all-consuming, rip-out-your guts sort of pain. It was more like a gentle remembering, a wound in my heart that would open for a few minutes, fill with emotion and then seal up again. It was not what I expected. It almost felt *good*. It felt like *love*.

Touching Dan's belongings and sharing their stories with Shelly, Jack and my mom was a very healing activity. In some ways I was numb, but in other ways I had never been more open in my life.

The first thing we did was remove all the medical supplies from his room to clear the space of anything that suggested illness. I knew I'd be spending a lot of time in there, sleeping, meditating, dreaming and praying, and I wanted to make it a powerful, energized environment where health and balance could be found. His wheelchair went into the garage, and the diapers, waterproof bed pads, catheters, bath chair and other supplies were divided between the local clinic and Dan's classroom where there were plenty of special needs kids who could use them.

Looking at these items from a distance made me realize just how dysfunctional Danny's body had become. It had been years since he'd been able to speak, feed himself or control his bowels and bladder. The catheters were a recent development since he'd lost the ability to urinate on his own. Catheterizing him three times a day, giving him an enema three times a week, bathing him every other day and spending at least an hour feeding him each of his meals was my entire life. So was singing to him, reading to him, watching movies with him, making him laugh, taking him for walks and loving him more than I'd ever loved anyone before, or ever will again. The years I'd spent as his mother were precious, as they would be for any mother. But the years I'd spent as a caregiver were *holy*.

I divided up his special possessions, keeping some for myself (I wear his socks and t-shirts to this day) and put some aside for friends, including his toys, trinkets and treasures. I gave my mother the dreamcatcher which hung on the wall above Danny's bed since he was a baby, and gave Amy the dog tags Danny had been given by the fighter pilots at the Pt. Mugu Navy base on the day he was their special guest and they dressed him in a flight suit and let him sit in the cockpit of an F-14.

Dan's model airplanes and framed pictures of airplanes went to Jack, because Jack had introduced him to the love of aircraft, and the two of them spent many hours together watching movies about World War II and playing a Playstation game called *Medal of Honor*, which never failed to whip Danny into a frenzy of laughter and excitement. Danny played the game when he still had motor skills and could use his hands, but even after he lost that ability, he loved to watch others play. Many of our friends delighted in this activity with Danny, and for a few years it was common to find a gaggle of guys in our living room playing *Medal of Honor* while Danny beamed in his wheelchair, laughing, kicking up his legs and giving his famous "thumbs up" sign (which he learned from the pilots at the Navy base).

As we were rifling through Dan's closet and drawers, we sniffed various items of clothing searching for anything that carried his scent. A characteristic of his illness was that he didn't perspire much, so he never really had any body odor, and yet we were surprised to discover that nothing we examined had any scent at all. Even the sheets where he'd slept and died had no particular smell to them, so we made it our mission to find something that smelled like Danny. The whole scene was quite funny, and we laughed as we inhaled socks and shirts and the dirty laundry that had piled up over the last week, but nothing smelled like him. At one point, Jack, with his usual dry sense of humor, walked into Danny's room and said, "He died and left us without a scent." We fell apart with laughter, and the story about searching for his scent with Jack's comment as the punch line became part of the text of the memorial service, which cracked everyone up and provided much-needed comic relief.

The service two days later was a joyous celebration of his life, and as I'd hoped, Danny made a personal appearance in the playful way people often do from the other side.

He made his presence known the first time when he caused the slide slow to glitch, even after five perfect rehearsals of it earlier that day. Nicole had been 30 minutes late for the service, and with 100 people sitting there waiting, I couldn't delay things any longer so we started without her. Everything went well until it was time for the slide presentation. For no apparent reason, the laptop stopped communicating with the projector, and despite all attempts to re-link it, the system refused to work. In the middle of this, Nicole finally showed up, and the moment she sat down in her chair, the system started up again. When the slide presentation was over, Lee Green stood up and pointed out to the assembly that Danny clearly did not want the show to start until Nicole arrived. The odd and wonderful thing about this was that I'd been working on this slide show for three years and had shown it to several people as the work progressed. I assumed that I'd shown it to Nicole somewhere along the way, but she told me later that she had never seen it until that day. Danny obviously knew this.

Danny made his second appearance at the memorial service when Nicole was at the podium reading a beautiful little dedication she'd written for him. About halfway into her talk she paused, with a pained expression on her face, and said, "Eeeewww ... there's a spider crawling on my paper." Everyone chuckled as I went up there to get rid of

the spider. She continued her reading, and when she was finished, after hugging her and thanking her, I said to the crowd, "Danny sent that spider because he's having great fun acting like a normal big brother, and what's more normal than scaring your little sister with a spider?" The audience roared with laughter, and later, a friend of ours who does maintenance for the building told me that in two years he's never seen a spider in the place.

It was beautiful. Everything was beautiful, even the sadness. It was a potent, powerful time, and although there was constant hurting in my heart, it wasn't raw and harsh and suffocating like I'd expected to be. It was gentle, and flowed through me like stardust. I was in a daze most of the time and assumed I was simply numb. I remember telling someone that I felt as if I'd been abducted by aliens who'd done modifications to my mind and then put me back into my life, never to be the same again.

THE EGG AND THE ASHES

Funeral homes are altars to the fear of death. They reverberate with sorrow and a sense of smallness before a God who, like a sadistic puppeteer, can do impossible things like make us die "before our time." I now know that we not only have a say in when and how we die, we create every detail of our own lives and our own deaths, with God radiating in and around us as a power source to help us manifest those creations. But funeral homes are not designed to acknowledge the love and light that is death. Most of them look like a set from a 1950s horror movie, furnished with stuffy antiques, fake flowers, no windows and old men wearing outdated suits who look like corpses themselves. While we were there arranging for Danny's cremation, I had the idea for a franchise of New Age funeral homes. The walls would be painted in vibrant colors, and large windows would look out onto wild, beautiful gardens. This idea will make a mint when the time comes for the baby boom generation to make a mass exit.

Danny's ashes were delivered to us the day before the memorial service in a big black plastic box, and that night Shelley, mom and I engaged in an unusual ritual. We'd purchased dozens of tiny plastic bottles with cork stoppers, some shiny gold fabric to wrap them in, and lengths of purple cord to tie around the bottle necks. These would be used to hold small portions of ashes, and would be given as keepsakes to those who were closest to Danny. That was the original plan, but as we sat there at the dining room table cutting squares of fabric and filling the bottles one by one with the coarse sand that had once been my son's bones, Shelley came up with a brilliant idea.

"How would you feel if Warren and I took one of these on our motorcycle trip to the Colorado Rockies next month?" she asked. "We could sprinkle the ashes at Independence Pass and Danny could finally get to ride on a Harley!"

I could see Danny clapping his hands with glee and giving us a big thumbs up. Shelly and her husband Warren were bikers and road trips were their passion, and thus the "Danny World Tour" was launched. In the months to come, dozens of friends carried the little bottles to the

far corners of the world, honored to take them along on their vacations and business trips. So far Dan's ashes have been spread in the Rocky Mountains, the Grand Canyon, Italy, Puerto Rico, Las Vegas, Ireland, Austria and on a Caribbean cruise. He even tagged along with Amy's boyfriend Mark when he was deployed to Iraq. We all prayed that Danny's energy might help put an end to the war.

Three days after Danny died I took my first walk on the beach as a *former* caregiver, completely alone for the first time in years, no longer tethered to Danny's body. As I walked through the woods toward the deserted beach that had become my regular jogging route, Danny was instantly with me. He had a huge blown up body like a Macy's parade balloon, and he was in front of me and all around me. I laughed at this and said out loud, "I feel you, I really do! Is this real?" I was so excited, and felt indescribably happy. And I heard him say, "Yes, it's real."

I asked, "Will you stay with me, or will I lose you?"

And he repeated, "You'll always be able to access me this easily when you can quiet the noise in your psyche. All the work you've done in recent years, your meditations and spiritual practices, have been preparing you for this."

When I got to the beach the water was like glass, and I'd never seen it like that before. Danny was still with me we began a conversation. I started by asking him to send healing energy to certain people, including Jack and Nicole, my mom and some others. And he assured me he would watch over them.

Then I told him that on the morning before he died I'd wanted to decrease his Morphine a bit so that he'd be more alert and I could talk to him (and I instantly realized that I could talk to him now better than I could in years). He said to me, not really in words, but more in the form of complete thoughts placed inside my mind:

"I wasn't really there during those hours. I was barely attached to that body, and I was experiencing the most beautiful sensation of release. Nothing could have pulled me back, not the sound of the vacuum or the phone ringing or even your voice. I was like a baby bird coming out of an egg, but I didn't have to crack the egg, it opened itself, very slowly, and it let larger and larger amounts of light in, and I just floated up out of the egg, and there were people helping to lift me up. I was aware of the earth world, of you, and the house and everything around me, but it was very far off in the distance, and I wasn't paying any attention to it. All I cared about was being gently pulled out of this egg, because the feeling was so beautiful and relaxing. The last time you saw me breathe I was held to the egg by the tiniest membrane, and finally I was free."

I sobbed with joy at hearing this, standing alone on the beach, just sobbing, so grateful to have connected with him and never wanting this moment to end. I found a stick and drew an image in the sand of an egg, open at the top, with Danny's perfect, precious soul floating out of it.

After I drew the picture I walked further down the beach, and after a while turned back toward the sand picture. As I approached the spot I felt a surge in my heart, something that might have been perceived as pain, but it wasn't. It was an opening. It felt like love. I've had plenty

of broken hearts in my life and I know what they feel like, but this was something completely different. I cried and cried and said out loud, "This doesn't hurt! This feels amazing. What is this?" And I thought maybe I was having a heart attack or something, but it didn't actually hurt, and then I realized that it felt good, really, really good, and I got an image of Danny putting his hands into my body and holding my heart in his hands and healing it. And just when I had that thought I heard him say:

"All the great teachers have been here to remind us of one thing ... that we are not these bodies. Every death reminds us of this, and that's what grief really is. It's about remembering our spiritual home, our source, which some call "God." This source is the true definition of Heaven, it is the frequency on which we are all truly able to operate, but we have lost sight of it. The pain of grief resonates on that same frequency because it's from the heart, and it's the same frequency as love. The pain of grief reminds you of home, just like love does when the heart opens. So in grief we cry and feel the frequency, and we want to be connected to the love we share with the person who has died, but in truth, we are just homesick for Heaven."

And as I stood there crying and thanking God and the guides and the angels for helping make this connection possible, I took the stick and wrote in the sand, "Thank you Danny."