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The
Last Day
of
Regret



Matthew J. Diaz

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Acknowledgments

I have written this book for my stepdad, although I do not know if he will ever have the strength to read it. I know he wanted me to record his daughter's legacy through my eyes because he trusted me to share my sister's story. God gave me a yearning to put on paper the vision he gave me a month after my sister passed away. I simply needed the past four years to process it.

I dedicate this book to my mom and my stepdad, who have been humbled by death and have shown me how to live even when the worst pain imaginable occurs. Death shows no favoritism or prejudice, and it waits for no one. From the depths of my soul, my voice cries out, "Our time is short, beloved. Do you know the one who can conquer this death?" Whether you have an answer to that question or not, this story is for you.

Thank you to my wife, Katie. You have taken this lowly man and shown me love and value. You have revealed to me how Jesus sees me—forgiven and free. I choose no other person but you to experience life with. Hannah loved you, loved me, and loved our children. Indeed, our family is a testimony to Hannah's life. Thank you for mothering our four children. We see your constant sacrifice for all of us, for the quintessence of our family is Christ shining so brightly in you.


To my surviving siblings, our deepest pain of losing a sibling presents to us a great journey we must travel. You are here for a reason; you have a purpose, and you are fearfully and wonderfully made. We all have grieved in our own way, and I pray you will find some healing of this wound that we share by revisiting our time together that difficult week and in some of the stories of our childhood. Forgive me if I fail to mention a detail or two, but the heart of what I want to capture is there.

I have always looked up to you as my guardians. One of you threw punches for me when other kids would make fun of my hearing impairment. The other would allow me to wake you up to comfort me when I had a nightmare. You would make a bed of blankets on the ground so I wasn't alone on my part of the bunk beds. Lastly, one of you walked me through my eighth-grade registration day so I was spared the middle-school turmoil of parental embarrassment—no offense, Mom.

You also showed me the ropes of college my first semester. We took an acting class together, and as you always have, you helped me at the next stage of my life. All three of you have protected me, and I need you to know that a major reason I look back on my life and love my upbringing is because of you. I can't imagine it any other way. In all the bad and the good, I'm grateful for our friendship and the genuine love we share for each other as adults now raising children of our own.

A special thanks to Carissa Eich, who illustrated the cover of this book. Given pictures of Hannah's tattoos, Carissa dreamed up something singularly meaningful, just as I asked. With much prayer and thought, she brought to life a unique and precious piece of art for which I am forever grateful. Thank you to Alicia Wall as well for coaching me through this writing process and helping me hone my skills as an author. Thank you to everyone at Northwest Christian School, especially Geoff Brown who constantly encouraged me to write down this story and has allowed it to be stitched into the fabric of our community. Thank you Cornerstone Church, @cornerstonehandler, for your part in Hannah's story.

In truth and love,
Matthew J. Diaz
September 1, 2018



But your dead will live, LORD;
their bodies will rise—
let those who dwell in the dust
wake up and shout for joy—
your dew is like the dew of the morning;
the earth will give birth to her dead.

—Isaiah 26:19

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Introduction

This isn't just my sister's story; it is very much my story and my perspective on our lives. The book begins with an introduction to Hannah and the tumultuous relationship we shared. Next, I go back to the point where our relationship went awry and recount the events leading up to her passing. Along the way, I share lessons I have learned as I reflect on the journey God brought me on. My hope is that the backstory regarding this journey will effectively reveal the weight of her death when it occurred, because the only way to discuss Hannah and give her story the justice it deserves is to walk you through the years that led up to her death.

As for her untimely departure, I revisit the details of Hannah's death—and the week between her death and funeral—so that you, my fellow sojourner, might feel the weight of the burden I carried. If you have never experienced a loss, this will shed some light in the hope that you will be able to get a glimpse of the reality of those who have. Many details about death are unknown until you lose someone. Like planning a wedding, planning a funeral and laying to rest someone who has died is emotionally taxing to say the least.

As I discuss my relationship with Hannah, I also share the grim details of the process of how we care for our loved ones in death. If you have lost someone, please make sure you are in a healthy place to reopen the wound or scar you carry, and allow God to heal you as you read what may seem very familiar to you. Don't worry; I will leave you with hope, for it's what keeps me moving forward. It is a hope that no matter how we feel today, the best days of our lives are still ahead of us.

Over the years, I have shared different aspects of the life of my sister Hannah with hundreds of high school students. I've shared her pain of

cutting, suicidal thoughts, and drug use, and her path of turning back to God. I've shared my own experience of losing a sibling, especially recognizing that I wasn't always the best sibling to her once we became adults. I've shared about her psychological disorder and the challenges that a Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) presents. God has shown me clearly that this story isn't just for me but for everyone who has asked the question, "Why does God allow me to suffer?"

We all suffer. Sometimes we cause our own suffering, and sometimes we cause others to suffer. It is intertwined within our fallen human condition to constantly struggle with how much suffering we will perpetuate on any given day with any given choice. Somewhere in my story and relationship with my sister, I had hardened my heart toward her. I caused Hannah pain, and I held grudges and was unforgiving.

The day Hannah died, my heart of stone just disappeared. There was no one to be hard-hearted toward, for she was gone. This experience allowed me to see, through God's eyes, the path I'd traveled over the preceding decade. It is this decade I share with you: where Hannah and I started, where our stories diverged, where they clashed together, and how I slowly healed.

Several months drifted by after Hannah died before I visited Hannah's therapist, who had made herself available for counseling because she was in a unique position to help me understand Hannah and her borderline personality traits. What the therapist told me that day removed my guilt, and I drove home with my burden lifted. She shared that Hannah loved me and, more than that, wanted to defend me at all costs. Hannah saw me as someone who needed her protection; she saw me as someone deserving her time and energy to fight for even when I did not reciprocate. Hannah had not given up on me. In that moment, I let go of my shame and guilt. I was free to love as Hannah loved: unconditionally.

Prologue

If I am honest, if I do not write these events down, I will forget them, and I never want to forget them. How else could I recollect an entire life's events of another person in something as small as a book? Surely the actual transcript of the life of my sister Hannah would generate volumes upon volumes. It would be enough to warrant her own section in the library.

My beloved sister's life would be in the adult nonfiction section, with each book labeled *H5* along the spine: *H* for Hannah (it should be listed by her last name, *Zeller*, but she absolutely hated always being last on the school rosters for everything) and *5* for being the fifth child in our family, the youngest. This section would be easy to spot; it would stand out among the rest because of all the colors, patterns, and crafts protruding from the stacks. The shelves would be lined with markings of a sharpie showing Hannah's various doodles and drawings made throughout her life as well as every tattoo she had accumulated. Every book would have a different penguin scribbled on its inside cover, with no two looking the same, because Hannah owned a multitude of stuffed toy penguins of various shapes, sizes, and colors.

Each book would be covered with an eclectic assortment of colors and styles of duct tape to protect the contents, and the pages would be bright pink, since Hannah managed to convince our parents to paint her bedroom from top to bottom in what looked like the medicine you hate to drink for an upset stomach. The cover of Hannah's last book would be carefully crafted out of wood but lined with light blue duct tape, with pictures of small black-and-white cartoon-shaped penguins in a pattern across every inch of the tape. There would be signatures on the cover

from all sorts of family and friends who had been part of the various stories throughout Hannah's life. It's as if this book cover were a cast for a broken arm that she would be removing someday. This last book would best represent Hannah and would stand out the most, simply due to its unique design. You can, in fact, judge *this* book by its cover.

Unfortunately for us, Hannah's story was cut short. The writing of her life suddenly stopped between the hours of eight-thirty and ten on one frightful Friday morning. We will never know how large these unwritten books would have been if the writing had continued until a more natural time in life took Hannah away.

If we were to read the ten books representing the previous decade of Hannah's life, we would find countless places where the words statistically should have stopped. With all the chances she took—teetering between life and death both for recreation and in depression—Hannah played Russian roulette plenty of times. However, she managed to keep writing through the blood, sweat, and tears.

There are moments of suffering in the life of my sister Hannah, and it is the last ten books that contained the most pain—pain that defined and marked her. Those nights of drinking, drugs, sex, overeating, cutting, and numbing the ever-deepening sadness in her heart would be inscribed in these darker books. The nights where Hannah felt so hopeless and desperate for love and forgiveness but also so shameful and alone would not be missed. Hannah carried this regret, and the vicious cycle of addiction was her way of escaping the pain. Regret about having gone down that road in the first place would keep her there. Who would be able to stomach this dark journey of Hannah's? Perhaps only those who have been there themselves, who understand the world that she lived in. In her early years, Hannah's world was full of light and laughter, but the latter section of her life became a shadow of what those innocent years of her life once were.

Every great story has a period of time when the hero is lost, where events seem hopeless, and where the ending seems inevitably dreadful and miserable. Hannah's journey is no different. Hannah began her life courageously, but at some point, she lost her way, and her life filled with sorrow. However, even though there was a decade of pain, it is in Hannah's last book—the one that got cut short, the one with the beautiful blue duct tape with penguins and signatures from old and new

friends—that she overcame the hero’s trial. This is how we know that it is okay that the writing came to an end. Hannah had finally fought through the darkness. Her struggles did not disappear in her life; temptation can still lurk within the far crevices of our mind. However, regret no longer held Hannah down—the regret that had kept her from the purposeful life that is possible for us all.

All great endings seem to come quickly and, in fact, only last a fraction of the entirety of the story. This is how it was with Hannah’s life journey. Of her twenty-four years of life, it is the end that defined her, redeemed her, and made her passing inexplicably hopeful. Her surviving family members visit this particular volume of Hannah’s life often and reflect on how the impact of this tragedy changed their lives forever. Even though she laid her pen down, all stories deserve an epilogue, an explanation of the impact of the written events from years later. The only way to reconcile the pain in Hannah’s life would be to give the right amount of attention to it, mixed in with the final events that came with her passing.

The irony of it all is that Hannah lived the last decade of her life with regret, and ironically, it is regret that I feel when I think of my relationship with her. This story of Hannah has left an indelible mark on my life. However, Hannah’s death, and the pain that she carried, should not be her legacy. One cannot change the past, so stewing over it with regret, wishing one could fix it, does not aid one’s journey toward healing. Hannah’s darkest moments need to be redeemed by showing the impact her passing has had in the weeks, months, and years that have followed her death.

I am writing this down so that I can remember the reason for the pain, for it is through the pain that Hannah and I shared that I have found peace in our stories. I never want to forget my little sister who loved me so greatly and freely—my sister who had a great desire to defend me and protect me, who taught me how to care and how to be an older sibling. Hannah gave me a vision of what I want for my own children.

Hannah’s life has deeply and forever elevated my life. I pray others find the same purpose and hope I have in telling the story of my sister: our tumultuous relationship, the regret I have carried, and how I am learning to still move forward and allow God to slowly carry the pain with and for me.

That's the confusing thing about pain: we want it to stop immediately. It's like a bee sting, a paper cut, or stubbed toe. Our reaction is to shake our appendage violently, hoping for the pain to subside. When the pain lasts longer than what seems appropriate for the stinger to be removed, the cut to be bandaged, or the toe to stop throbbing, we fear something more extensive has occurred. We equate the length of time we experience pain with the size of damage that has occurred.

We bring the same assumptions to our heart. When our heart hurts longer than what we perceive to be an adequate amount of time, our mind moves toward greater depths of hurt. We pray and ask God to remove the sting of death quickly or to bandage the cut of a broken relationship and apply lidocaine liberally. After we have cursed the sky at the inconvenience of tragedy, we pray that the pain will stop. When the pain continues, we wonder what greater problem lies within or start to doubt God's existence. If God were real, wouldn't He take our pain right here and right now? Why didn't He remove my sister's pain when she was a fourteen-year-old girl who had lost her sense of self-worth and would rather entertain suicide as a common thought?

Time is relative, Albert Einstein theorized. "Put your hand on a hot stove for a minute, and it seems like an hour. Sit with a pretty girl for an hour, and it seems like a minute. That's relativity." Our minute of pain appears to be lasting for an eternity. In the grand spectrum of eternity, our pain seems not to be too long of a time to an infinite God. I have come to believe He does not equate the length of time to the depth of the wound. When He heals us, it might seem slow to us, but if time is relative, His pace of healing is perfect.

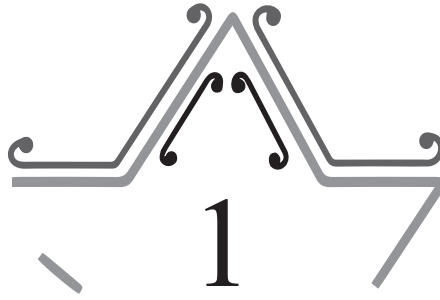
Would we wish a careless surgeon to quickly suture and cauterize a wound after he had recklessly removed only a few cancerous cells, only to find out months down the road he missed some? Allowing God to heal us, and allowing Him the time necessary to do so, is completely relative. Perhaps this is why the greatest mark of a believer is perseverance, because it is the soul who has fully embraced the truth that God's timing is not our own who can stay the course. God will heal my heart and remove my pain in the right amount of time, as He did heal my sister.

My healing began in an unexpected way and at an unexpected time—or I should say, an unexpected moment in time. From the outside,

Hannah's death appeared hopeless and meaningless. People tried to say the right things to make me feel better about the situation, but for a person grieving, it feels all in vain. Before we can draw any significant conclusions about Hannah's death, it would be beneficial to follow her life's journey long before the events that transpired on the day she died and in the week that followed. This is Hannah's redeeming story, all the pain and brokenness captured in a few words to hopefully provide validation for you, my dear reader—validation, perspective, and an adequate response to the regret left by the reality of death, pain, and sorrow.

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The Halloween Debacle

“Hannah wants to make plans for Halloween,” my mom was explaining to me over the phone.

“I can’t make plans based off of what she wants. I have two boys to think about,” I argued back.

“All your sister wants to do is to go trick-or-treating, and she thought it would be fun to go with you around your apartment complex—she says you get the best candy there—and then for you all to go to the carnival at her church where she is volunteering,” she explained.

My mom was trying to play peacemaker between my sister and me. We were all living in a large metropolitan area but were technically in two separate cities. My wife, three children, and I were living in an apartment about forty-five minutes away. I had just left—or been asked to leave—a job I had invested a lot of time, energy, and money in while we were pregnant with our third child. That child would come a month early, a baby girl weighing just three pounds and eleven ounces, quickly after our move to the apartment.

Hannah and I had been drifting apart for years. I was twenty-nine, and she was twenty-four. Our communication had regressed backward in time to when we were children fighting over the best spot on the couch to watch TV. I would often be confrontive with her; I had become not so gentle with my words. I had decided that I would either not talk to her at all or be blunt if I needed something. Not talking was easy; trying not to be blunt with my fully grown adult sister was difficult. So I would opt

not to talk. The other option was to have my wife talk to Hannah, which she did a lot because they had become close over the years.

My wife has a way with people that makes you feel good about yourself just by having her listen and be engaged and respond with joy, interest, and enthusiasm. Hannah needed that, and I had lost the ability to communicate in that way with her. I was in the most difficult season of my life, and the last person I would consider adjusting plans for was my sister. I had learned years ago that Hannah always wanted more, always took, and it had become draining. I drew a line of how far I was willing to go to accommodate her. Hannah was an adult, and she needed to grow up a little.

I thought to myself three things: one, Hannah was already heavy enough and didn't need more candy; two, she was twenty-four and didn't need to be trick-or-treating in the first place or using my kids to do so; and three, why would I want to go trick-or-treating *and* go to the church carnival on a school night with my two- and seven-year-old rambunctious boys (who would be asking me every second if they could eat the candy) while carrying around a seven-week-old preemie baby who only had energy to eat and sleep? Eating and sleeping were, by the way, two things she prevented *us* from doing. Our colicky little bundle of joy needed to be awakened every three hours to eat until she reached a normal gestation weight. That was a recipe for exhaustion for my wife and I, and it weighed heavily on my decision about plans for Halloween: what was the minimum I could do so my boys were content and I'd exerted the least amount of energy possible, because that is what both my wife and I were low on?

Did my sister Hannah give any thought to my feelings or how difficult my life had been over the past several months? Our baby had to be delivered by C-section because my wife was showing early signs of preeclampsia. Because our tiny newborn weighed only three pounds eleven ounces, she remained in the hospital for two weeks. On top of that, I was working a dead-end job that I had to drive forty-five minutes to each way, through the desert, on the most dangerous road in the state. I had left my career as a youth pastor in search of an organization that was bigger, better, and would provide me with my next step in gaining more experience. I obviously had not found that bigger and better; instead,

I was working as a glorified tutor in a computer lab for high school dropouts or kids who did not fit into the high school setting and just wanted to get their coursework out of the way. Not having found what I wanted in ministry, I fell back into teaching, which was what I'd studied for in college. However, my first job offer was at a charter school that only offered a computer lab position.

The ironic thing was that I was neither a pastor nor a teacher. None of the things I had been trained to do were involved in this job. I had learned from my stepdad that you take any job that is offered; you can't be picky when it comes to experience and having a source of income. With four people to take care of, it was not a time for me to be fickle with job offers. I just needed to take it, accept the responsibility to take care of my family, and pray that God would honor my willingness to take a lower-paying position to see to our immediate needs.



"Mom, I don't have time to cater to what Hannah wants. Tell her we will just meet her at the carnival," I explained with my manipulative logic so as not to have her come to the apartment and use my boys as patsies. Katie did not mind staying home with our baby girl, and I hoped that both of them could get some rest. I decided to suck it up and let the kids ride some rides, get some candy for an hour, and call it a night.

Before my mom asked, I told her that we were going to just trick-or-treat around the complex ourselves. I was unwilling to do both things with Hannah. I thought that what she really wanted was for us to see her in her element at a church she had been involved in for a little over a year and where she had started volunteering in the children's ministry. I had not considered her needs in a while, and I thought it would be an easy gesture to bring the boys to see her at the carnival.

Hannah could never talk to me herself, so all verbal transactions were through my mom. Granted, I had given her reason to consider me unapproachable. She avoided conflict, and several years back, I made the decision that avoiding her or confronting her at every angle would be the only way to survive my time around her. If I know there is a problem, my way of fixing it is to deal with it head on, using my bluntness. After that

stopped working through many shed tears, my mom eventually became the filter for our communication.

I felt that Mom was just enabling Hannah to not deal with her own problems, but I was not going to create conflict with my mom. I needed my mom too much to break off that relationship. I didn't think I needed a relationship with Hannah at all. But if I neglected Hannah, my mom would be hurt, so I felt like the only way to keep my mom's and my relationship in tact would be to accept Hannah on a surface level and not engage in much more.

I was either verbally directing lines of questions and assaults, building defensive emotional barriers, or being completely silent. My eye contact was minimal; I would just act busy around my sister. It's easy to ignore people when there are lots of things to do. Our visits would be just short enough that I could go through my to-do list and manage not to go deeper than a casual hello and hug goodbye. I would hide behind my wife, allowing Katie to be conversational and for her friendship with Hannah to take the place of my own. Katie became the friend I used to be to Hannah but felt I could no longer be. I could not be Hannah's friend without feeling used, either for my stuff or for her to get something from me.

Some people are givers, and some are takers. My sister was a taker, and my solution was to stop giving. It was Hannah's world, and the rest of us were just living in it. Hannah had my mom and stepdad wrapped around her finger and at her beck and call. Ever since they left our hometown—just the three of them when Hannah was sixteen—she had been an only child. The older four of us had grown up and were on our own, but Hannah still had her teenage years left at that point.

I never really got over the feeling of abandonment when my mom, stepdad, and Hannah moved to Colorado. I was mad that the reason they moved was for Hannah to start over in a new place. I was jealous that Hannah took all their time and energy. At every wedding, graduation, or big event, Hannah would find a way to bring everything back to herself—or at least take my stepdad away from the event at hand so she could have her timely migraine attended to.

I don't remember when I first started having these brash, judgmental thoughts and observations. Looking back, my reasoning was that I expected Hannah to grow up and be an adult like the rest of us. If she

would naturally grow out of her teenage years and become an independent adult, then I could respect her. Hannah would tell me that she felt like I didn't treat her like an adult, and the irony was that I didn't think she *was* an adult. How could I tell Hannah that her assessment was true?

During the year prior to the Halloween debacle, I didn't see that she had grown up, taken responsibility for her life, and stopped relying on mom and dad to support her. I would shrug her off and think that it wasn't true. I treated her like my older siblings treated me at her age. My twisted form of measurement was an eye for an eye, but it was not my eye for hers. It was that my older siblings figuratively took my eye at some point growing up, so I would take one from Hannah. I used to have compassion for her, but whenever it was that I decided she should be an adult, I defaulted to following the letter of the law: "But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Exodus 21:23–24).

The conversation about Halloween ended for a few days, until my mom decided to give it another go. I assumed that was after she talked it over with Hannah—because, of course, Hannah couldn't talk to me herself.

"I don't think Hannah really cares about the carnival. She just thought that would be fun for you. She really just wants to go trick-or-treating with all of you," my mom said in a desperate tone.

"Okay, fine, she can come, but we don't have time for the carnival if that's what she really wants."

It was all about free candy for Hannah—the only night she didn't have to pay for the candy that she hid in her room and yet left the wrappers for anyone to find. When she said she wanted to spend time with my boys but at the same time said she can score the most candy if she comes along, a red flag waved around in my head that I was being used. What adult goes trick-or-treating, still trying to fill a pillowcase with free candy? That was my sister's goal, and if that was how she wanted to present herself, then I could not stop her, though I did try.

This whole conversation had started over the misunderstanding that Hannah was demanding that we do everything she planned, regardless of my opinion. I had typically, and often, seen Hannah in a selfish light over the past six years. She'd called me out on my treatment of her on more than one occasion.

“You have changed. Why can’t it be the way it used to be?” she would ask. I never had a clear answer; I simply would use my marriage as an excuse and say I didn’t have the emotional energy to care for my young family and for her. Hannah wanted me to cater to her as I used to, when I would take her to the movies or drive several hours to a concert we both enjoyed, but I couldn’t anymore. I used to have this place in my heart reserved just for her, where I cared deeply for her well-being and emotional state, but that place had been rented out to time and space ever since the move to Colorado had distanced us.

It was during her time in Colorado that I grew up, and I expected that she’d grow up within the same time frame as I did. It had been eight years from the time Hannah, my mom, and my stepdad had moved away to Colorado, to the Halloween incident before Hannah’s passing. As I have mentioned, she was twenty-four and I was twenty-nine, so surely all of life’s rules and consequences should be equally applied to the both of us. When I was twenty-four, I was pursuing my wife, who had a two-year-old son at the time. I wanted Hannah to see that she was a little behind overall in the growing-up thing. In reality, she was well aware of her shortcomings.

Hannah was not as ignorant as I had assumed, and her accusations of how I felt about her and treated her were all true. I was just too prideful to admit that to her or change. Hannah was heavily dependent on my parents. She was a community college dropout with no job. I guess my view of her showed. I did not realize that my scheme of ignoring her was speaking louder than my actual words. The Halloween plans were just a symptom of a greater problem of how I viewed Hannah: as a self-absorbed, whining, stuck-as-a-teenager hypochondriac.

I was convinced that hypochondria explained Hannah’s intense need for attention. Every time there was a diagnosis in our family or extended family of any kind of psychiatric disorder, Hannah mysteriously had it too. In my own dysfunction, I found myself increasingly irritated with Hannah. I was given the diagnosis of obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) when I was twenty-three, and I had been seeking treatment for it ever since. I was frustrated with Hannah the more she researched the symptoms of OCD to see how my experience related to her. Lo and behold, within several months of my own diagnosis, Hannah proclaimed

that she was OCD as well. She would insert into conversations how her OCD told her to do this or that.

When she was a teenager with depression, I had sympathy for her and could empathize, but as we became adults, I found it selfish of her to label herself with these varying disorders. The final proof that she was making everything up was when Katie and I found out, when our son was four, that he had sensory processing disorder. As I could have predicted, all of a sudden, Hannah claimed she was experiencing all the same symptoms as her nephew. I just rolled my eyes at that point. Had she never heard of a self-fulfilling prophecy? Hannah was the walking textbook definition.

Of course, my own diagnosis of Hannah's hypochondria was so much deeper than that. I'd started noticing these interesting behavior patterns years before the Halloween debacle. I noticed something had changed in Hannah, although perhaps it had been there all along. Hannah was diagnosed with BPD at the age of twenty, but it had been brewing in the back recesses of her mind since she was fourteen. I had great compassion for her when she was first admitted into the behavioral health wing at the hospital, but honestly, after a decade of what I called "crying wolf," I did not care; it just seemed like an excuse for her to act however she wanted.

It wasn't until a year and a half after Hannah's death that I met another person with BPD and was forced to learn exactly what Hannah carried around with her. All the problems I'd experienced with Hannah as she became an adult, and as I became an adult, could be traced back to a lack of understanding about her BPD. I was not too far off with the whole hypochondria guess; she did think she had those disorders, but not for the same reason as a real hypochondriac who has a fear of getting every type of sickness. Hannah was never afraid of her self-diagnosis; she just added it to a list of things that, to her, explained her behavior.

In the years following her death, I was shown that the BPD component that explained her hypochondria was a desperate need for attention and validation. If she saw that any of us was getting attention for a disorder, she needed that attention too. When I felt that everything was about her, once I studied the traits of a person with BPD, I learned it really *was* about her, and that was a major part of the struggle.

After doing some research and having a book recommended to me, *Stop Walking on Eggshells* by Paul T. Mason, MS, I started putting the pieces

together of what exactly went wrong in my relationship with Hannah. I often felt that she would create these lose-lose scenarios where no matter what I did, she would come out as the victim and I the antagonist. It turns out that people who have BPD do exactly that. Their deepest insecurities about themselves turn out to be what drive their behavior and create contradictions of how they treat people around them.

Often, people with BPD act out with the people closest to them. At some point in time, I had forgotten how close I was with my younger sister and that our problem stemmed from my not understanding that she treated me the way she did because of how close she felt to me relationally, even compared to our older siblings. The other half of the problem was my lack of empathy, maturity, and humility. If I'd known the things I know now about people with BPD, I would have at least had empathy.

Empathy is what allows us to see other people as we see ourselves. It comes when we think of ourselves less and take a moment to live the life of another person and understand his or her pain and problems. It's been called walking in another person's shoes. My feet were not much bigger than Hannah's, and I could have walked very well in some of the many shoes she collected over the years. I simply chose not to. I had entered my twenties and become an adult, and I expected her to do the same. When she did not match up to my expectations, I judged her for it, although I had set the bar at an unattainable height. The expectation in my mind was simple: "Act like an adult, and I will treat you as an equal." Until she could do so, I kept her at a distance.

Several years after Hannah's passing, one of my older sisters wrote me an email saying that she missed the "kind and understanding Matt Jo. Where is your compassion? Where is my younger brother who is empathetic, kind, and caring?" Hannah was right about me, but it took hearing it a second time from my older sister to register. Hannah saw right through me and knew I was treating her differently, even though I did not want to admit it.

I had started selectively loving the people around me based on whether I felt I could give them that love. I was disconnected from what love truly is; therefore, I only had a limited amount of love to share. My boundaries to keep my own heart safe and secure required that I limit

who received love from me. My love was conditional and reserved only for my wife and children. Other than that, I had no time or energy to invest in any other family member. I always thought it was Hannah's problem, but when my older sister confronted me years after Hannah's passing, I realized I was the common denominator in this equation of broken relationships.

Another great regret was learning about Hannah's deepest pain too late—and learning that I was acting out of my own pain. A broken person cannot love a broken person well. I did not see myself as broken. It's like what Jesus said to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2:5: "Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first." I had forgotten that I too had fallen from grace, and it would be a long time before I repented.



It wasn't until after I had gotten married, took on a stepson, and moved to live with my mom, stepdad, and Hannah in Colorado Springs that the division between Hannah and I was made most evident. I had absolutely no compassion for Hannah, and that became clear within the first few weeks of our arrival at the house on Stone Fence Drive. Hannah's brokenness and my brokenness would collide, and the result was silence.

I didn't talk to her, and although she tried to talk to me, I wouldn't keep the conversation going or stick around very long. My heart had grown cold; I thought I was masking it well, but Hannah had great empathy. She knew how I felt without me needing to say anything. Hannah knew she was broken. She just wanted me to understand her, and I didn't. Our time living together in Colorado would end with what I have called the Colorado Confrontation, which has been a major source of regret since her passing.

My time on Stone Fence Drive is a paradox in my life. I wish I had not moved there at all, and yet without it, Hannah's death would not have the distinct impact it has had on my life today. We sometimes wonder if God could possibly pick up the pieces of our failed choices. I often wonder if there is anything I can do to mess up God's will for my life. What if I already have done that? Is there a way to just pack it up and move on

and not deal with broken things? Can we just leave them on the side of the road or throw them in the trash and not have them damage us in some way?

God, over a long period of time both before and after Hannah's death, has shown me that the pain is necessary to understand both humanity and, ultimately, God's grace. It's what Jesus did: he became human so that he could empathize with our pain and offer the grace that we could not give ourselves. My relationship with Hannah is both a regret and a necessity to be able to share this story. It is this story that will be used to change lives.

Would I rather have my sister here with me today? Most people would say yes—it is an automatic response. I would say that if the person who was lost was a sort of glue, the type that held things together, then yes, we would always want that person back. However, Hannah was in deep pain; Hannah was suffering in this life, and Hannah was deeply broken. If I am honest with myself, I'm not sure having her back is even something to consider.

On the one hand, we cannot go back and change anything, and yet in the world of hypothetical situations, I do not know all the things God was sparing her from. It appeared in the months leading up to Hannah's death that she was doing much better than the past five or six years. However, there were more than a dozen other times her life could have been taken and yet she lived. There must have been a reason God allowed and accounted for Hannah's departure from this earthly plane in just the way it happened.

I believe she lived no longer and no less than what God intended. I honestly believe her life would have continued to be one of suffering and misery; maybe God in His mercy spared us from something that would have been even more tragic. I do not think it is worth my time imagining what could be worse, but the reality is that it could have been worse, and Hannah's untimely death is something I choose to believe God has used and will use for His good ends.

My relationship with Hannah wasn't always so stressful. We had a whole lifetime before things changed at the house on Stone Fence Drive. There was even a time while Hannah was living at that house that we created amazing and unforgettable memories. At some point along the

way, those memories started to fade because they had become painful—for me but probably even more so for Hannah. It's easy to get wrapped up in painful memories, because sometimes the pain in our lives seems stronger than the feelings or memories of times without pain. Pain seems to be an overpowering odor in our minds that no amount of perfume, cologne, or spice can cover. The bad smell is still there and very apparent, but even worse is that the good smell no longer smells good at all. The smell of pain is hard to scrub out of the recesses of our minds.

If the opposite of pain is joy, a person could assume you are either fully in one state or the other. However, there is a third feeling that is an attempt to replace the pain, and that is apathy or numbness. In reality, joy represents just one third of our feelings. The other two, psychologically, are not good to live in because living in pain or apathy does not promote growth, health, positive change, and most importantly, a positive self-image. If you don't view yourself well, you will not perceive others well.

The measure by which you view yourself is usually the measure that you project onto God as well. There is a point in our conversion to our faith in Christ where we must recognize our own shortcomings. We cannot approach God with an attitude that needs nothing, reflecting apathy. What is needed is to bring God our pain, a recognition that our lives are not as they are supposed to be, and an acknowledgement that He alone can fix the problem.

A man who claimed to be this very God walked the earth two thousand years ago and addressed this very problem of pain. He stated, "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). Trouble comes in all forms, and one of the most distinct ways we are emotionally aware of trouble is pain. This God-man finishes the statement by saying, "But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). If we live only in pain after we have already acknowledged all that Jesus has done for us, then it seems we are living in the very condition Jesus wanted to free us from. We feel pain but were never meant to carry it on our own.

Hannah knew pain, and it would take me a lot longer to realize how great her pain was and how my own hurt would become a hindrance to her. I changed from a loving brother to a judgmental one, and if I look back and retrace my steps, I eventually recognize what happened. I've heard it said that "Hurting people hurt people." This would be true of

my relationship with Hannah. To validate Hannah’s pain and recognize where our lives diverged, I must share events well before her tragic death, as well as those surrounding the week leading into it and the day of her funeral. Putting these pieces together has led me to see, finally, what Jesus promised: the part where He says He has “overcome the world.” To state it another way, Jesus even overcomes our own self-inflicted wounds.

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