

INFINITE HOLE

A woman fell into a hole; a deep, dark slimy hole. She struggled, but could not climb out.

Desperate in this ugly pit of despair, she called out help. A passer-by heard her cries. He said, "Don't worry, I'll find someone to help." No one ever came.

A construction worker walked by and heard the woman. He said, "Don't worry. I'll find a ladder." He never returned.

A minister stepped out from a nearby church. He said, "Don't worry. I'll pray for you." His prayer went unanswered.

An old lady heard the voice in the hole crying for help. She jumped down into the dark hole. The trapped woman was astonished. "Why did you jump into this hole with me? Now we are both stuck in this horrible place."

The old lady said, "Don't worry. I've been here before. I know the way out."

Jason had bright icy-blue eyes, curly brown hair, and a bit of a temper. He was our first and he was beautiful. The geology students played with him at the departmental 'Friday afternoon tea'. Sam and I were poor students, but proud parents.

My plan for the summer included a few months on the farm with my folks while Sam attended geology field camp in the Teton Mountains; a degree requirement. This gave me the perfect opportunity to take a break from classes and let Jason play outside without worrying about city traffic. I looked forward to baling hay, feeding cows, and spreading manure. Ah, yes, smelly clean farming—it's great!

Mornings in upstate New York are soft and pleasant; Thursday, June 26, 1975 was no different. Dad raked the hay in the lower pasture, I tended to some household chores and my brother, Lar, avoided his. Outside, Jason filled a bucket with dried cow plops then dumped out the mess, only to refill the bucket; his version of fun on the farm. Around noon Lar decided to feed the cows. Being sixteen, noon began his day. He loaded hay on the back of the pickup truck. I went to the mailbox. It was a busy road so I snuck past Jason. I didn't want him beyond the front of the house. With a truck full of hay, Lar backed up to turn down the lane behind the barn. He could not see that Jason had stepped behind the truck. I heard Lar scream.

Details are blurry, but I do remember telling Lar to run to the back pasture for Dad. He knew CPR better than me. When they returned—a few minutes—I had Jason in the house, desperate to make him breathe. Dad continued CPR, and I called for the ambulance.

In the ambulance, I caught the paramedic shake his head from side to side, indicating their futile efforts. Their look of helplessness matched mine. A neighbor volunteered to drive Dad and Lar to the hospital.

The emergency room wait seemed endless even though it took only a few minutes for the doctors to pronounce Jason DOA. “We could see the tire tread across his back,” the doctor said. Then came the questions. After the staff people finished their inquisition I signed some paperwork and the neighbor drove us home.

The air fell silent on the way home. Lar and I sat in the back. By the time we got home he had curled up in the fetal position on my lap, withdrawn from reality. All six feet of his confident demeanor evaporated. I feared there would be two casualties before the end of the day.

We walked into the house and panic struck. “Oh my God,” I shouted, “we’ve been gone for hours. Surely Jason is awake from his nap.” not thinking, I reacted to what I thought should be. I ran upstairs

believing I heard my beautiful baby crying, only to find an empty bed with his favorite blanket and an old stuffed animal. At that dreadful moment reality slapped me in the face. I fell into that slimy, empty, lifeless hole. I wondered about God.

Later, I remember sitting in a dark silence in the front room. Again, Lar waddled up in an emotional limbo on my lap. He couldn't think, speak or function. Lar was afraid to leave my side, and I was afraid to let him go. I was the older sister, and he was the obnoxious little brother. Our relationship was typical of annoying siblings, but that horrible day in June everything changed. Words were unnecessary. Sibling rivalry turned to glue. Thoughts flowed between us and hugs became an act of absoluteness. We were one in the universe.

Time and details are a blur. Funeral arrangements needed to be made and people had to be notified. Sam was in geology field camp in Wyoming, hiking around the Tetons. Phone service did not exist. We had to call the sheriff in Jackson Hole. When they found Sam he thought the notification was a very cruel joke. What a ridiculous way to find out your son was killed.

My mother was in Florida visiting her mother. When Dad called Mom she immediately contacted the Red Cross so they could notify my oldest brother in the Navy and, of course, out to sea. The Red Cross refused to help. Ugly words were exchanged after which Mom called Naval Headquarters in Washington. A helicopter was dispatched and big brother was on his way home. Emergency travel arrangements were also made for both Sam and Mom. At a time when our grief did not allow us to function, several details had to be resolved. The minutia was overwhelming.

Saturday morning Sam's family wanted to light a candle. We drove a mile down Clinton Street to St. Gabriel's Catholic Church. The sanctuary door was locked, so we knocked.

"You can't come in," said the man dressed in dungarees and a work shirt.

"Of course we can," Sam's cousins argued.

Again, I wondered about God. *A church is a house of God and God don't close.*

Apparently God did close . . . and I didn't care. *God locked us out and nothing made sense.*

"I just swept the floors for this evening's mass. I won't have you making a mess," said the man holding his push broom.

Jason's funeral was a blur. I chose to bury him in his favorite blanket. It seemed right. At the cemetery, the casket was difficult to find. It was so small. It wasn't obvious as we entered the centuries old resting place. I do recall a bug crawling in senseless formation on his casket. It didn't bother me. I just felt blank.

Sam and I stood beside our baby's crypt and held hands, not knowing what to do with our new lifelessness. But that was all about to change in a little general store, in a little town in the mountains of Wyoming. I met a stranger who changed everything.

The day after Jason's funeral Sam had to fly back to Wyoming to finish field camp. I went with him. My family said I should—I had no reason to stay home. Aimless and unable to function, I was the steel ball bouncing from one bumper pad to another in a pinball machine. Right, wrong or whatever; my folks said I should go, so I did. Time proved them right.

Waiting to greet me at the campground in Alpine, Wyoming, was a large pile of laundry. Sam left in a hurry, and housekeeping details were not high on his priority list. Sam and I set up camp away from the student barracks. We pitched our tent near a little stream, away from the bustle of other students. Everyone left us alone.

My first order of business; do the laundry. My second requirement; do not go mad. I didn't know what to do; so—I started with the laundry. It's a benign chore, or so I thought. Turns out, doing laundry put us on a path of healing.

Downtown Alpine has two buildings. The most visited is the Elkhorn Saloon. It is next door to the gas station-post office-library-grocery store-laundromat. I was in the laundry part, sorting dirty clothes when a woman came in with her messy pile. Seeing me, a stranger in a very small town, she exclaimed, “You’re the one!”

I questioned her with a quick, “Excuse me?”

“You’re the one who just lost a son.”

The Sheriff’s search for Sam made us big news in a small town. I confirmed her correct guess with a slight nod, hoping not to expose my frayed emotions to this stranger. “May I tell you my story?” She spoke in such a gentle tone, I agreed.

The woman, several years older than me, maybe fortyish, extended her arms straight out, perpendicular to her body. It reminded me of a game Jason and I used to play . . . *I love you this much!* She explained her motion. “The hole you feel is this big. I know. I lost a child several years ago.”

“The hole is endless, no sides, no bottom, no dimensions,” she continued. “an infinite hole.”

I believed her intentions were genuine; she knew about the pit which had laid claim to Sam’s and my spirits. This angel in the laundromat grasped energy from the hand of God, compassion extended without caution.

The enlightened woman continued, “Over chunks of time, eventually the sides will become visible and the bottom of the ugly hole will begin to show. You will even go through an entire day without crying.”

She was right. Time did shrink that blasted hole and the day came when we did not cry, at least until we realized we did not cry, then we felt guilty and cried!

Time passed and the hole—that horrible, slimy, endless, infinite hole—started to shrink. We went through entire days without a stab of grief. The hole shrunk by insignificant measurements, but

nonetheless, daily. A day without sadness became days. Eventually, pleasant memories of Jason's short life replaced the emotional pain oozing from the infinite hole.

The beautiful lady relived the loss of her child and shared her story with me. I only saw her for a few minutes in a most ordinary place. On a sunny day at the very end of June, 1975, in Alpine, Wyoming, I met God. She was doing her laundry.