



BIRTHMARK

A MEMOIR ABOUT
FINDING YOUR
SOUL'S TRUE PURPOSE

RAQUEL MARIE MOSCARELLI

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THE CALL

...And then the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom. -Anais Nin

SECTION ONE

On September 12, 2006 at 3:33AM, CST, my life changed forever. Chad Wayne Emond, my Ivy League recruited, *Sports Illustrated* ranked #1 quarterback, my only sibling and adored younger brother, chose to end his life. At the exact moment of his passing, I awoke from a deep slumber. I would not return to sleep or to my life as I had known it. My journey through the depths of darkness would require me to reassess everything I had believed to be true to that point.

Exactly, 12 hours later, my dad called me at my home in Marblehead, Massachusetts, where I was living with my husband Steve and our four-

year-old fraternal twin boys, Nicholas and Mathew. He was crying and it was difficult to hear him or understand what he was trying to say.

He finally composed himself then quickly blurted out a message that would turn our lives inside out. He said, "Chad was found dead earlier today ... he hung himself." Dad's words seemed to echo repeatedly in my head. I set the phone down. I went outside and sat on one of the concrete steps that led up to the front door. I gazed out at our yard, the black wrought iron railing, and the driveway. I felt as if I had been broken open, split in half, and I began to sob from someplace so deep inside of myself that I barely recognized the sound of my own voice.

Chad and I had shared many connections in this physical world by virtue of the fact that we were siblings. We had the same parents and lineage, the same DNA, and we each had a small brown birthmark on the right side of our faces, just above our upper lip. In a strange way, I focused on this one similarity and came to believe that a "Birthmark" was not just a mark on our skin, but was also a symbol of our souls' purpose. Now, with Chad gone, I began a mission to discover

my soul's purpose. I felt responsible in a way, too, to live my life more fully, taking on Chad's work and life in all I was going to do.

FOOTBALL AND COLLEGE

Football had been Chad's greatest joy ... and the seed of his undoing. During his senior year in high school, as quarterback, his right index finger – essential to throwing a football – was crushed during a play on the field. The result of this physical injury was profound.

At the time, several Ivy League and Division One colleges were interested in recruiting him. After the injury, however, these elite, high-ranking schools backed off. Chad's ego suffered a heavy blow as he ultimately ended up taking a Division Three recruitment and scholarship at University of North Dakota. The change in how he had thought his life would turn out compared to his new reality was understandably devastating. And, at just 18 years old, Chad lacked the emotional intelligence to repurpose himself and his life. For him, this seemingly minor injury became the first catalyst in what

was to become a downward spiral from which he would never recover.

To make matters worse, a rigorous football schedule at UND had prevented him from graduating on time, with the rest of his class. He needed to take more classes. That meant he would have to spend another winter in Grand Forks, ND. Chad was able to finish his last required courses and by some miracle was on track to graduate in the spring of 1997.

That spring, however, Grand Forks, North Dakota and the surrounding area was hit with what has come to be known as “The Red River Flood of 1997,” documented to be the worst flood in the area since 1826. It devastated the area from Fargo to Winnipeg, but Grand Forks was hit the hardest. The Red River was known to overflow its banks regularly, only this time it completely shut down the city and the school. The city was evacuated and class never resumed. Chad graduated without ceremony or any official recognition.

Chad found himself living in the evacuation center, and his cries to friends and family went unanswered. That was the first time he ever

thought about suicide as a way out. It was his first time in the darkness that would, eventually, consume him.

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Chad had become involved with drugs as a way of dealing with the unmet expectations in his life. He was in pain. He felt drugs were the perfect way to take “the edge” off – they made it easier for him to avoid dealing with the challenges he was facing each day. The drugs delivered a separation of sorts, and made him feel as if he was merely a spectator in his own life. They meant he didn’t have to think, make decisions, or deal with the trauma he had experienced.

But this casual opting-out of his life didn’t last long. As any addict will tell you, there are no “slow dances” when it comes to drug abuse. Before long, he was no longer taking the edge off, but was completely checked out – mentally and socially. He had increased his drug usage, was drinking excessively, and was engaging in random, casual sexual encounters. He was losing himself completely.

Occasionally, he would connect with that small inner voice, the inner child who was now so far away, buried in his past. That only compounded his pain because he could not ignore the man he had become. His soul yearned to reconnect with the boy he had been, but he could no longer face the few people in his life – like me – who loved him unconditionally. Unable to go back to the life he had left behind and with no way to continue the new, desperate life he had created, he chose to escape. He left this life because doing so seemed to be the only answer. That one decision was the easiest choice he'd made in many years. He had fallen completely out of touch with reality.

THE POSSE

Chad had been a part of another team from the time he was a young boy of age seven. The group of boys called themselves “The Posse”. The Posse quickly became inseparable. You would rarely see one of the boys without another from the group, or they'd all be together. They spent countless hours together on the

football field, skateboarding, or hanging out at the mall, and they were together at school, having sleepovers, hanging out at home, watching movies, playing video games, talking about girls, listening to music, and just learning about life together.

The Posse started to see a change in Chad when he went to college. He had gone through some struggles on the football field in college, but had worked through those and was becoming just as much of a success, if not more, than he had been while in high school. But, he was not doing as well as the image he projected. It appeared the time away from football started to get to him.

Ever since Chad's passing, I often reflect on the fact that his friends in the Posse continued to mature after high school ... they grew and developed into adults, they got married, had mortgages, and started families of their own. Why was Chad unable to make a similar transition?

Perhaps, without the structure of school and academics, he was really at a loss as to how to move forward. From there, his drinking fueled

his isolation, and his retreat almost seemed to have been accelerated by the successes of his former peers. When I look back with the clarity that only hindsight can provide, I can see that Chad's demise was not really a surprise.

The night following his funeral services, the posse stayed together in the home of one of the men. The group had spent the entire day and most of the night sharing stories about Chad, their lives growing up together, and the circumstances that had led to this moment in time. That evening, there was an intense storm packed with rain, lightning, and it had even knocked out the electricity. The men who had once made up the posse ended up sitting around a boom box, listening to music and sharing their stories by flashlight, as if they were still young high school students.

As the three o'clock hour approached and they realized their own families would soon be waking up, they agreed to play one final song. The song was "My Old Friend" by Tim McGraw. At the exact moment the song ended, the entire home became illuminated; the electricity had been restored. The posse sat in silence, aware

of the synchronicity that seemed well beyond mere coincidence.

Just a few short hours earlier, they had each carried Chad's casket and placed him into the hearse to head off to his final resting place. Now, at this moment, they all shared with one another that Chad had been an amazing force in his physical life and they agreed that he would be a guiding force for all of them from the other side. They felt his presence in their hearts and souls, and believed that Chad would always be a part of the posse, looking out for them as he had done in their youth.

THE FUNERAL

Three days after the call from my father, I found myself at my brother's celebration of life ceremony. At his wake and funeral service, we had dressed Chad in his # 7 Burnsville Senior High School home game football jersey. We set out footballs for the guests to use so they could write notes to Chad on them. In a beautiful concurrence of fate, the night of his wake was

that year's BHS homecoming football game. I later learned the school had held a moment of silence to acknowledge Chad's passing, honoring his team and the legacy he left on the football field.

We discovered that my brother had been in contact with a pastor and had even attended his church. The Pastor shared some words about how Chad had been spending his last weeks on earth. Chad had come to believe in the *after life*. He had had numerous fateful conversations with the pastor and had come to believe that there was a place beyond our physical world; it was one that was pure, filled with light, love, happiness, compassion, and well being. I'm sure, in hindsight, that Chad's view of Heaven seemed much more appealing and with more to offer than the life he would soon choose to leave behind.

As with most funeral services, my brother's obituary and the eulogy would be our family's time to review and recapture Chad's contributions during his short life. Personally, the phrase, "Begin with the end in mind," started to make sense to me. I saw Chad's transition to

another form as a continuation of his life, even though he was now on the “other side of the veil.”

His obituary offered little for the curious. It began simply with, “*Chad Wayne Emond, 33, died unexpectedly on Sept. 12, 2006 in Rochester, MN.*” It went on to give his date of birth, his survivors (our mother Cheryl, father John, myself, my husband Steve, and our sons Matthew and Nicholas.) Of course, it also mentioned his outstanding football career at Burnsville High School, noting that he had been the quarterback when the Braves won the State Championship.

My eulogy covered much, much more about Chad the person, the brother I grew up with and loved with all my heart. I reflected on Chad as a baby who, according to my parents, had such big feet they were worried ... until the doctor dismissed their concern with a simple, “He’ll probably play football.” And, that was the end of that. I remember holding my tiny baby brother. I could also remember our summer days at the beaches in Minnesota, where we would play in the sand.

He had grown into a fearless snow skier, taking on the black slopes when he was just seven. He was an all-around amazing athlete, student, son, uncle, and my only brother, whom I looked up to in awe.

I shared memories about Chad's love for sports, particularly football. No one was surprised as he became Burnsville Senior High School's first ever starting sophomore quarterback, or when he was named "Player of the Game" of the State Championship and, later, "Player of the Year." He was even the *Sports Illustrated Quarterback of the Year in Minnesota*. He had such a bright future ahead of him.

His former college coach at the University of North Dakota, Bo Bollinger, said a few words about Chad, too. He called him an "unselfish player who played an important role as UND built their football program into one of national prominence. He added that Chad had been "... a real team player."

I felt it was important to also share how life had totally changed for Chad after the

end of his football career at UND. Football had been his life, love, and passion, and when football was gone, he became completely lost.

Chad had met his nephews, my fraternal twin sons, Nicholas and Matthew, just once – when they were only five months old. Even then, it was apparent that he loved being an uncle. He bore a striking resemblance to Nicholas and would often comment about that after their meeting. To this day, everyone sees the physical resemblance in Nicholas ... his beautiful blue eyes, blonde hair, and athletic body. We know without a doubt that he has Chad's love and gift for sports.

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SEARCHING FOR EXPLANATIONS

Chad was never able to accept the kind of help that may have saved him. It's not that we didn't try. We tried throughout his troubled life,

but to no avail. When people are lost, they expect those around them to be there, to anticipate their needs, and to drop everything at a moment's notice. But, as we all know, life is happening to each of us, every day. People are involved in their own lives, dramas, relationships, work, and so they are not always available to answer the call of those in need. If you've ever had to put your plans or life on hold to attend a funeral, wedding, birth, or other special event ... good or bad ... then you know how challenging – and sometimes impossible - it can be.

We are each individuals and we are responsible for ourselves – our lives, contributing to society, working, our relationships, and more. So when a loved one needs us, we want to be there for them fully, but our circumstances can often play a tremendous part in such situations.

OUR PARENTS

My mother had a hard enough time taking care of herself. She, too, was in pain, the result of a hostile and heartless divorce that she had gone through with our father. She fell apart afterward and spent the next 30 years in and out

of various mental health facilities. Coping with Chad's new challenges were taking a toll on her, as well. She wasn't strong enough to care for herself, let alone help Chad with his challenges.

At the time when Chad needed help the most, our mother was dealing with her own challenges. She had been evicted from subsidized housing in Northfield, Minnesota. She had gone off her medications for paranoid schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, and was found living in people's vehicles just trying to stay warm. Eventually, she was able to get back into the mental health system in her home state of Minnesota. She re-entered a live-in program where her needs would be met. She was living her life one day at a time, unable to deal with any outside or additional challenges.

Our father wasn't in the position to help, either. He had been diagnosed with alcoholism. Around the time Chad was dealing with his greatest challenges ever, our father had just completed treatment and was living in a halfway house. This was in the early 1980's. His passions were beer, Crown Royal, playing poker at his office, golfing, and he loved our cat Fluffy.

In most of my memories, I seem to recall my dad treating our cat better than my mother, brother, or myself.

To say he was not there for me or Chad when we were growing up is an understatement. Our mother was mentally ill, so her negligence was not anything we could blame her for. But, when it came to our father, it was obvious that he simply chose not to show up in our lives. There were a few exceptions to his absence, however. He loved Chad's football games, playing golf, and eating my cooking. There was not, however, even one critical moment in our lives for which he was present.

When I went off to the University of Wisconsin, Madison, we never even discussed how college and the associated needs would be met. It didn't take long for me to learn that calling home or discussing money was not anything my dad wanted any part of. Because of this, I ended up working two full-time jobs every summer to pay for my education. I waited tables, worked as a maid, or did whatever I could to put myself through school.

When Chad began his downward spiral, it was up to me to step in. When his former roommate had called me to come and help, I had to take off from work to rescue Chad. I drove seven hours only to find him on the side of the highway. Everything he had while in college was now in large, black Hefty garbage bags. I met with his friend who had called me along and the head football coach at UND to discuss Chad's situation and crisis.

This was the first time in Chad's life that football was no longer a part of his life. Football had been the only thing in his life, the only focus and important factor; he had been raised and groomed for this single purpose. Without football, Chad's life focus and guiding compass were gone. The devastating impact of losing his "reason for being" led Chad to suicidal thoughts. After discussing his situation with the coach and a few of his friends, I knew the only thing left to do was to bring Chad back home to Minnesota, keep him close, and get him the help he needed. It was no surprise that our dad was unwilling to help.

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It was 1997 when I helped Chad get his first job. It was an outside sales position that would have him earning more than \$80,000.00. The company provided a full-size pick up truck. Having a company vehicle and such an impressive salary was incredible for someone in their early 20's. In spite of this outstanding opportunity, Chad never seemed to have any money. In hindsight, it is obvious that he was spending it on drugs and alcohol. It wasn't long before his drug use began to impact his job performance. He was fired from this position and become incapable of holding a steady job.

In 2001, Chad completed an in-house rehab program, but from the moment he was released he went back to self-medicating with drugs and alcohol. Upon reflection, I believe this was the true beginning of the end. He was a mere shell of the young man he had been and we had no idea how to get him back.

A year later, Chad and my mother came to Chicago, Illinois, where I was living with Steve and our 5-month-old twins. Prior to my mother and brother's arrival, my husband Steve and I had talked about letting Chad live with us

permanently. We wanted desperately to help him get sober and healthy.

Chad's behavior in his professional and personal relationships had become erratic, unpredictable, combative, and frightening. His decline into darkness took a full ten years, during which time I received phone calls from girlfriends and police officers requesting my support and assistance. I stepped in to help him in every way I could, from covering his car payments to avoid repossession, purchasing clothing for interviews and basic living essentials, repaying debts he owed to his girlfriend after they ended their relationship. My brother would stay up all-night and sleep most of the day. He would awaken in the early afternoon.

We encouraged him to pick up job applications; we discussed mental health and addiction treatment options. He would always tell me that he didn't have any problems ... it was the rest of the world that needed help. The last night he stayed in our home was the last time I saw him alive. The next morning, I saw clearly just how different he had become. I realized I was frightened to be in my own home with my brother there.

I sat at the top of our stairs, while Steve, my mom, and our 5-month -old twins were fast asleep. Chad had been drinking vodka and was clearly drunk. I can still feel the tears running down my face as the reality of the situation became evident.

Finally, I heard him stumble down the stairs, literally bouncing off the walls, until I heard him land in our guest room in the basement, where he had been staying. The noises finally stopped and I believed he had passed out.

The next morning, I quietly asked my mother to take Chad and leave, even though it was before they had planned to leave our home. I was no longer able or willing to enable Chad's destructive force affect my family, my marriage and home, or my precious sons. I asked them to leave that morning. They drove back to Northfield, Minnesota. It was the last time I saw my brother alive.

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It was four years after that, in the fall of 2006, that Chad had taken his own life. At the time, I was struggling with the demands of my first year back at a full time job while taking care of my family. The twins were now four and a half years old. My sales position included traveling from New York City to Florida on a weekly basis. My husband's job also involved a hectic travel schedule. The strain of traveling, working, and raising a family was taking a tremendous toll on my mind, body, and spirit.

Chad's death affected me deeply. Just two months later, on my 38th birthday, I resigned from my traditional job in corporate sales. To have said at that point that my heart was no longer in my work would have been a tremendous understatement. With Chad's passing, certain aspects of life no longer seemed important. My quest to find my true passion suddenly became a matter of urgency.

Losing Chad so violently and unexpectedly at a time when I felt I was at my weakest, spread too thin emotionally and physically, had a tremendous impact on me. I struggled to find answers that did not exist. Almost immediately

after Chad's death, I began to experience unexplainable phenomenon. From that first night, when I had awakened at 3:33AM, the exact time of his passing, I began having intuitive feelings about people, places and things without any practical explanation. I would later discover that my feelings and intuitions were valid. I knew when certain events were going to happen. I saw pictures in my head that were quite different from what my physical eyes were seeing. I was definitely dealing with some new challenges.

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We each tend to find our own ways of coping. During this time, I would awaken exhausted, overwhelmed by the feeling of fatigue from not getting enough sleep. I started each day with a giant frozen cappuccino to get me going. Then, three or four times throughout the day, I would reach for a diet soda; the caffeine buzz it delivered would keep me going.

We weren't eating a healthy diet, which didn't help. My family relied on Chinese take-out and pizza for our nightly family dinners. In the

evenings, we had quality time. We would play with our sons, then read them stories, have bath time and tuck them into bed by 9PM. The twins seemed happy with just eight hours of sleep a night, which didn't leave me much time to handle any of my household tasks. Each morning, I would awaken more tired than the day before. Around the time the boys were three, I had started taking a nightly prescription sleeping pill so I could fall asleep and match their schedule of rest. Of course that made the next day more challenging, so again, I would rely on the boost of caffeine throughout the day to keep going.

I was well aware of the destructive cycle I was in. I was exhausted and feeling the effects of the various stresses in my life. I knew I had to make a choice to live a healthier, more holistic and sustainable life. I saw my doctor. She wanted to put me on more medications. Instead, I stopped drinking the sodas and everything else I believed might be doing my body more harm than good. I wanted to be fully present for my boys.

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A friend of mine, Calie, was a yoga teacher and massage therapist. I scheduled a one-hour massage with her. After arriving in her room, she asked if there were any areas of concern in my body or information for her to be aware of. I shared with her that my brother's suicide had seemed to trigger some new unexplained experiences of intuitive feelings, premonitions, and seeing through my mind's eye. I told her I was searching for answers regarding these new experiences and, even more importantly, I wanted to understand my purpose in life.

Callie listened without judgment and shared that she sees an astrologer, Jane, for guidance. She gave me Jane's contact information. I scheduled an appointment with Jane to have a reading at her earliest convenience.

I had no expectations or preconceived notions about my first session with Jane. I arrived at her office a full 45 minutes early, hoping I would be able to calm down before our meeting. While I waited, I went over the questions I wanted to ask: Why was I born? What is my soul purpose? What is my true "Birthmark"? This session

turned out to be the first of seven sessions Jane and I would have together.

Jane read my brother's astrological chart from his birth date to the date of his death. Then, she combined it with my birth chart and reached a striking conclusion: Jane said that my brother and I were two separate souls with one shared purpose. This is how it became my life's work to complete the mission left undone by Chad's passing. Now, I just needed to discover what that mission was!

After seven sessions with Jane, I became increasingly frustrated. I was driven to find answers as to why so many strange occurrences were happening; I wanted to know where I was heading or where I was supposed to be.

I asked Jane if she knew a medium. I was desperate to know my soul's purpose. I connected with Jane's recommended medium, Mary Ann, later that day. I had no idea what to expect after our initial contact and was unclear about what may or may not happen during our session together. We scheduled an appointment for 10 days from then.

I arrived at Mary Ann's office and waited. She soon appeared and led me into her small office. She gave me an overview of how she worked and processed information. She told me she would be connecting with both of our spirit guides for information and that she would relay their information to me. I was welcome to take notes and to tape our 60-minute session. She wasn't interested in asking me any questions about why I was there or what I wanted to know. She simply invited me to relax, breathe, and get comfortable.

We recorded the session. I've since listened to that recording several times, so my memory of what transpired is crystal clear. It has reinforced my resolve on many occasions since then. Chad explained, through the medium, that the path he'd been on had started out quite soft and beautiful but, before long, it had become an endless, winding, and often rocky road. This particular journey of his had started 10 years before, when he lived in Minnesota.

After my sessions with Mary Ann, I eventually came to terms with what happened to my brother. I found peace and clarity regarding his

downward spiral and, for the first time in many years, I believed he was safe, at peace, and filled with love.

ENTER RAQUEL

“Death is a mirror in which the entire meaning of life is reflected.”

Sogyal Rinpoche

SECTION TWO

I came into the world occurred on the eve of Thanksgiving in the late 1960's. Both of my parents had been horribly ill with the Hong Kong Flu. Prior to my delivery, the staff at the hospital had ordered an x-ray of my mother's womb to help gather information before the birth.

I entered the world with double pneumonia and bronchitis. The doctor was amazed that I lived ... and later proclaimed, "She will be a fighter." When I was 6 and a half months old, I had German measles. My mom later told me that I nearly died at birth and again when I was just six

and a half months old. Now, in hindsight, I believe it may have been an attempt to exit this world. In light of my brother's suicide, I now question both of our lives and our intentions for this shared lifetime.

I remember one day when I was in my early 30's, my mother shared with me that my father had never wanted to have children. That is when I discovered that my parents had plans to get married and that it was right before their wedding that they found out my mother was six weeks pregnant with me. I was born into a family where my father had never wanted children. Before they even had a chance to enjoy a typical, romantic "honeymoon stage," they were already dealing with the start of a family.

I continually hope that having greater understanding of these circumstances might somehow shed some light or understanding about my life as I raise my twins and continue to search for answers to all the "whys" that rattle around in my head regularly.

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THE FIRST YEAR AFTER CHAD

Fast forward to the first year following Chad's suicide. I found myself constantly searching for answers. In the summer of 2007, I awakened in the middle of the night to what felt like being hit with a physical bolt of lightning. It was so powerful, I knew I would not be going back to my peaceful sleep.

We had been enduring an intense stretch of excessive heat with no relief for more than two weeks. I remember lying in bed, listening to my husband's breathing. As I took a breath, wide-awake now, I became aware of the sheer strength of my husband's breathing; it was strong and deep.

I wanted to bounce my body up and down in the hopes of disturbing him just enough so that he might shift his weight and his breathing would settle down. Then, I had a minor epiphany. While the woman I used to be would have indeed proceeded to disturb her husband to create greater comfort for herself, I realized that I held the answer: it was I who needed to

change my response. I paused in that moment and asked myself, “Who was I to interrupt someone’s breathing?” What a question! As I lied in bed, I began to consider this simple question on a much deeper level. My thoughts drifted to my beliefs in euthanasia. I believed that if a person, animal, or other living being ever came to a time for where they were in pain and suffering, helping them to end that suffering was fine.

I was amused at my own thought process because these were not questions that I had ever given a great deal of thought before. It seemed that since Chad’s passing, my beliefs, thoughts, and opinions were growing and changing. I questioned whether I would still consider it okay to assist with ending a life through euthanasia when any living being is in endless pain and suffering.

Or, is it possible that we are *all equal*? Is it possible we all serve equal purposes in this physical world and that – on some level – we are all one? What if it was up to me and I chose to end someone’s suffering without ever knowing that perhaps, that pain and suffering might have

been their designated purpose and path while on earth in this lifetime?

Most of us believe that others may have been placed on this physical earth to teach others about pain and suffering? Were there, in fact, *teachers* of pain and suffering, who experienced these merely to create awareness in the hopes of helping others with their own challenges? These were tremendous questions that had no answers. If we are all equal, all living beings living our life's purpose, who then has the right to take another's breath away, regardless of the circumstances?

I did not shift my weight to intentionally disturb my husband. Nor did I do anything that would adversely affect his breathing in that moment.

Then, I realized I had my answer to the biggest question of all: "If there is a oneness in the universe, and we all have an equal purpose, would I ever take away another person's breath?" My response was, "No."

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A TIME FOR QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

I studied philosophy while I was at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, but this was the first time in my life that I found myself starting to think like more of a philosopher. I had excelled in class, loved it, and ultimately received an “A.”

The course and the questions that were asked and answered in it drove me to think about the basic elements necessary to sustain life. First, we need air - the most basic element to sustain life. Next, we need water. Without these two critical elements, nothing else matters; not even the most fundamental necessities of food, clothing, and shelter.

I knew that H₂O, simple, abundant water, was essential for all life forms on Earth. I was drawn to this and knew as soon as I'd realized its importance that helping people around the world to have clean drinking water would become my life's work. I wanted to assure that people from all walks of life would have access to this life-giving element, necessary for the most fundamental level of standard living.

I had searched so desperately to uncover my purpose, my reason for being. As I pondered the importance of the fundamentals of air and water, my purpose came rushing into my head with the force of a mighty stream. I realized I had finally found my answer in the incredibly simple, life-giving and sustaining element of water. The answer was water.

I had received the answer that I had been searching for ever since losing my brother. I had come so far and had many passions: I was a wife, a mother, a yogi, and I was a writer. Now, I also had my *purpose!* I would become involved with providing clean, healthy, and accessible water to all beings on this earth. This was it.

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INSPIRATION FROM A GARDEN

I often wondered why I did not dream about Chad at night, when I was asleep. I realized the answer might lie in the fact that I was able to connect with his spiritual presence whenever I wanted to, at any time of day and wherever I was. Most people expect this of twins,

and we've certainly heard about the connection between a parent and their child, being able to sense when the child was in danger. Familial connections can be incredibly strong, and I felt I had that kind of connection with Chad. I felt him with me every day, sometimes it was as if he was standing right beside me.

During the summer of 2007, still reeling from recent events, I made the decision to slow down my family's hectic lifestyle. I wanted to make this the year that I would plant a garden. The excuse that we didn't have time to indulge in such an endeavor was no longer valid. We needed to slow down and there is something about working in the dirt that is incredibly grounding. When you are planting seeds, pulling weeds, fertilizing or watering a garden, you feel worlds away from the nearly inescapable technology that bombards us every day.

Once I made the decision that this was the time to plant a small vegetable garden, I felt my breathing change. It slowed down and I began to feel more peaceful. I was excited about being able to connect with nature and the earth. And, while this was my personal project, I hoped it would become a family project.

Having a garden wasn't an exercise in becoming the best gardener I could be; I didn't aspire to be a certified horticulturalist. Instead, my time in the garden became a profound example of the life cycle.

I loved mornings in the garden. I would often go out very early, having been awakened by the birds' singing and before the sun had cast its morning glow on the landscape. I would water the small vegetable garden with a sort of dance routine, back and forth slowly so that the plants would each have an opportunity to drink what they needed and then to drink a little more.

As anyone who has ever spent quiet mornings in a garden would attest, it's the most wonderful and peaceful time of any day. While showering the plants with water, I often would sing to the plants or talk to the Universe.

One particular morning was very special and it remains ever-present in my mind. I was singing quietly the song "My Old Friend." I could practically feel the entire earth as one living organism; the energy and life force were

apparent. The Indian word for this life force is “prana” – or “breath of life.” It was so intense that I could actually feel this life force course through my body, and with each beat of my heart, I felt it in my blood.

I looked around my neighborhood, examining my neighbors’ yards, their gardens, the animals, and could even see the energy in the homes. I became aware of a direct connection between the prana in people’s yards and their lives. This snapshot in time took my breath away in the peaceful dawn that day.

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JUNE, 2007

In June of 2007, my dad arrived for a visit. I felt compelled to rent a convertible for the weekend while dad would be with us, hoping to share some of my fondest memories with him, my husband Steve, and the twins, Nicholas and Matthew. When my brother and I were growing

up, we had a 1969 sky blue Pontiac Firebird convertible. It was a beautiful car. My dad used to say that it was his one true love.

I have many fond memories of riding in this car with the top down; as kids, we didn't have a care in the world. On Sundays, after my mom, brother, Dad and I had worked in the yard raking, mowing, or picking up twigs, our parents would reward us for our labor by taking us to Dairy Queen for a treat. These were, by far, one of my favorite family memories because, as we'd sit together eating, we actually *felt* like a real family.

We decided to drive up the north shore coast from Marblehead, Massachusetts to Wentworth by the Sea in Portsmouth in New Hampshire. The drive felt as if it was right out of a movie set. The weather was absolutely gorgeous, inspiring Dad to share one of his favorite lines: "I couldn't have dialed up a better day myself." The sun was bright and warm and the sky was crystal clear. I remember seeing the clouds and feeling as if they held the answers to every question anyone in the world had ever asked.

Nicholas and Matthew were a bit apprehensive about riding in the back seat of the convertible at

first, so I sat in the back between them. We covered ourselves with an enormous beach blanket. Between the blanket and their mom close by, their concerns soon blew away in the breeze.

The drive was breathtaking; the colors, sounds, and smells were vibrant. I felt incredibly alive. The top was down, we were at one with the great outdoors, my hair was blowing in the breeze, and I was sandwiched between our lovely sons, draped in the warmth of the energetic universal life force of *prana*.

It didn't take long for the boys to say they were hungry. We had planned to take a leisurely drive and take our time enjoying the day. But, the reality is that with 5-year old twins, our intentions may have been a bit unrealistic. We stopped along the way and had an early lunch at a very typical New England clam shack.

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We were led to Newburyport, Massachusetts instead of our original plans to go to Wentworth by the Sea. As we drove into

the coastal town, I swear I could taste the energy on my tongue, almost like the sensation you get when you lick the tip of a battery. I was sure we had been led to the “right” place at just the “right” time.

Street performers were engaged, entertaining visitors. People from all over the world were visiting New England on this day, and in spite of each individual’s diverse background, the vibe was that we were all connected ... we were all one.

I felt as if I was experiencing this town during another period in time. The calendar stated it was Saturday, June 30, 2007, but I felt that I had time traveled to another period, perhaps 150 years earlier. The prana was carefree, light, and airy, and we could all feel the vibrant energy of the town.

As are most 5-year old boys, Nicholas and Matthew were steeped in enthusiasm for anything to do with pirates. So, when the street performers had finished their act, we noticed that a local independent toy show was having a “Pirate Day.” With every five-dollar purchase, customers would receive *pirate tokens*. It is not

surprising to know that when we stopped for lunch, we also shopped in the clam shack's gift shop and had bought the twins pirate tee shirts. They were in heaven!

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Our wonderful outing continued as we all agreed to take a trip to Gram's Homemade Ice Cream Store. Ice cream had been a staple in our home growing up, so this fit in perfectly with the old-fashioned theme our coastal drive was offering. Once at Gram's, we each had a serving of their famous "Plum Island Turtle" ice cream - a dreamy combination of vanilla ice cream, caramel, chocolate chips, and cashews. We walked to the playground nearby and let the boys enjoy the slide and play hide-and-seek with each other while we sat and slowly enjoyed every lick, chocolate chip, cashew and ooze of caramel.

My Dad and Steve needed to go back to the convertible to drop off some bags, so I took Nicholas and Matthew to the old-fashioned penny candy store. Childhood memories flooded my mind and reminded me what it felt like to be a kid again.

I remembered being in the backseat with my brother Chad, the two of us nearly crazy with anticipation as our family traveled from Minnesota to South Dakota to visit Mount Rushmore. We were bombarded with billboard advertisements that promised everything anyone could want. I was mostly concerned with when we were we going to arrive at *Wall Drug*, whose ad promised every treasure a child could think of. I thought about how much would I be able to purchase with my roll of quarters that dad had given my brother as enticement for our good behavior on the car ride.

Now, inside the penny candy store, I felt my sons' indecision as they became overwhelmed with the selection. It didn't take them long, however, to locate some gold foil-covered chocolate pirate coins in a pirate chest. For them, the choice was easy. They'd found their treasure!

We reconnected with the men and strolled down to the ocean side boardwalk. We watched the sailboats humming along and the cigarette boats smoking and polluting our ears with noise. We felt the love of being a family, walking arm-in-

arm, relishing the laughter of the children as they ran ahead on the sidewalk to the end of the boardwalk. I pulled in a deep breath all the way down to my center core, taking in every sight, sound, smell, touch, and sound, wanting to insure that this moment was real and that I was completely present. It was such a glorious moment and I wanted to be sure I would be able to recall every detail of this day as a fond memory for the rest of my life.

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As the sun began to set, we headed home. The drive back to our house was void of the excitement we'd all felt as we'd begun our adventure earlier that day. We wanted to linger, breath, absorb, and connect with the universe, nature, the sky, wind, birds, and rustling leaves before returning to our home.

As we neared our neighborhood, we passed a church. Magically, the bells began to ring the moment we drove past. It was 6:00 PM. Not

everyone might have noticed, but on this very special day, we had “happened” to pass another church just at noon, and drove by another at 5:00 PM, and each time, the steel church bells just happened to ring at exactly the second we drove by each of these churches. This contributed to the magical experience of being a family unit, all as one, riding along in this convertible with the top down, open to the universe.

Someone else might have considered this a mere coincidence, but not me. I believe that when we practice being aware, pay attention to our presence, and open ourselves up to the universe with *conscious living* that the universe will support us at the right time with exactly what we need. My Dad, Steve, Nicholas, Matthew, and I were all under the same roof in the same home that night, and it was an incredible experience I will never forget. It was Utopian, as if we were all under one umbrella, protected by the Universe and safe as could be.

Later that night, I was awakened at 1:21 AM from a deep sleep by the sounds of dragon-fire lightening, the smell of summer rain, and an

energy that was so intense that I felt we might have run every appliance in our house on that *universal energy* and they would run!

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JULY, 2007

I had begun to see more *physical* signs of Chad's life and light in our home. I would notice the light in the office closet come on without anyone having flipped the switch. The same thing was happening with the light in our bedroom.

I got this message immediately. Chad was our light, our angel, and he was with us.

On Friday, July 6, 2007, my friend Janet and I had plans to go to the Tim McGraw and Faith Hill "Soul2Soul" concert in Boston. We met at the parking lot of one of our favorite Italian restaurants called Massimino's and walked over to the *Boston Garden*. We had arrived in plenty of time to get to our seats in time for the opening act, Lori McKenna. We were seated on the 7th level, which is a great place to sit. I felt it was a miracle because I had only selected "best

available” for our tickets when purchasing them online a few days earlier.

In addition, we were seated in full view of the Boston Bruins’ Stanley Cup Champions Flag. These championship flags made me think about all of the historical championships and defeats that had occurred in this very location.

The concert was electric ... literally! Faith Hill had so much energy that her hair stood on end. I felt blessed to experience so many perfect moments, and was very thankful to have had the opportunity to share this evening with Janet. During an intermission, I stepped out to look at the concert paraphernalia. I was blown away to learn Lori McKenna’s new album “Unglamorous” was scheduled to be released on Chad’s birthday, August 14th. I knew he was making his presence known to me and could feel him with me more and more.

I came home from the concert, and in the wee hours of the next morning, the 7th, at 12:03AM, I got onto my computer to journal some notes about the evening. Next, I went into my *iTunes* account that I just opened for the first time the day before, and found three songs in my

account. I had only purchased one song the day before, and that was “Fireflies.” I had downloaded it to prepare and get even more excited about the concert. There were no email notifications, no charges, and no physical-world communication at all. I knew these songs were important, but I was tired, so I decided to go to bed and look at them later.

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I anticipated that the next day to be a very powerful day. The date, 7/7/07, indicated that there would be tremendous, positive energy. I opened up my iTunes account and listened to each of the three songs that I had discovered in my account. The first song was “Like Humans Do” by David Byrne, and it completely blew me away. I felt that Chad sent this song to me to give me a very powerful message. This was, in itself, a miracle. The lyrics touched me deeply: *I work and I sleep and I dance and I'm dead, I'm eatin', I'm laughin' and I'm lovin' myself. We're eatin' off plates and we kiss with our tongues, Like Humans Do.*

There was no other explanation for the phenomenon of finding three perfect songs in

my account ... songs I had not ordered and which I had never heard before. Surely, Chad was letting me know that he was still very much a part of my life.

THE END: 120213

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I wanted to live deep and suck all the marrow of life...” –

Henry David Thoreau

SECTION THREE

The path that led to my husband, twin sons, and I to make the move to Madrid, Spain in July of 2007 was both simple and complex. Steve had received a Spanish degree from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, after which he had spent three years living in Spain. We met and became engaged at the Alhambra in Granada, Spain in the spring 2000, and went on to spend our engagement evening in Seville. We both had a deep love for Spain.

I have always wanted to become fluent in another language. When I met Steve, I was so impressed by his ability to speak Spanish and his time spent living abroad. This was something

that I had dreamed about doing while growing up, but it was just a dream. I didn't know anyone who lived in another country or who had that kind of experience or information I needed to support this dream.

After Chad's passing, I grew increasingly determined to find my life's *soul purpose* and to make the most of each day. I was gifted to have such a supportive, loving, caring, and open-minded husband and partner. Steve was willing and open to allow me the space to find my soul purpose.

I had made a conscious choice not to return to the corporate world after Nicholas and Matthew were born, and had planned to be at home until they were at least three years old, and possibly until they started kindergarten. My work in the corporate world before Chad's death had been invigorating, stimulating, rewarding, and challenging. I had proven to myself that I was capable of being a wife, mother of twins, and working full time with a travel schedule. But, this wasn't how or what I envisioned our life and family to look like for the long run.

I believed that moving our family to Madrid was an opportunity to go “within” myself with the support of my husband, our twin sons, and without the security blankets of the United States, Massachusetts, and Marblehead, family, friends and my native English language. Our intention was to simplify our lives by immersing ourselves in the old-world lifestyle of Europe. My vision for this new, authentic life was to focus on having healthy clean water, food, clothing, shelter, holistic wellbeing, and the love of good friends and family. I had started to find everything else to be non-essential. Steve resigned from his demanding, exhausting, high-pressure, high technology sales position that had him traveling every week in order to re-focus on our family and a simpler lifestyle. We were about to begin a new chapter in our lives.

OUR FIRST WEEK IN SPAIN

My initial feeling upon arriving in Madrid was a strange combination of euphoria mixed with uneasiness. Steve, the boys, and I had actually taken this tremendous step and had

now arrived physically, spiritually, and emotionally in Madrid. Although I struggled with my Spanish, I was proficient enough to negotiate a deal on a two-bedroom, two-bath apartment in the heart of the city.

Within just three short blocks as we walked down our street, we were at the Prado Museum. I focused on my breath, I became acutely aware of my surroundings and the tremendous shift we'd made, and I was instantly at peace. I felt at home in our new apartment, neighborhood, city, and country. This was the authenticity, peace, and contentment that we had come so far hoping to experience. We'd barely arrived and already I felt everything I'd hoped for in these new surroundings.

We continued to walk toward a park so the boys could play. Just one street over from our apartment, we passed by a few beggars waiting outside the Church of Jesus. There was a tour group waiting in line to enter the church. Seeing the homeless panhandlers was unsettling.

I remembered in that moment how my mother had been found living in a stranger's car in the month of January in Minnesota. She had been

evicted from her subsidized apartment following some dramatic episodes with my brother. I wondered if my brother ever spent time on the streets. I imagined them both being without a home. I wondered if there were times in their lives when they were without water, food, clothing, shelter, and health care.

I will never be comfortable knowing that human beings are not having their fundamental survival needs met. My heart sank thinking about the children lost. I felt a pain in my heart knowing that all around the world, there are mothers who don't know where their children are. My heart ached when I realized that so many human beings have been abandoned and discarded. Now, halfway around the world, I was confronted with the very thoughts that I was trying to escape. I saw the world as it is and realized that people deal with the realities of life wherever they are. I felt a resolve beginning to grow deep inside my being, knowing that I wanted to find a way to somehow help alleviate this kind of suffering in the world. I could see the needs of the masses more clearly than ever before.

THE PLAN

My plan for our time in Madrid was to live like the locals. But, before we could enjoy the local life, we had to focus our time on getting settled into our apartment, find our way around, and stock our new home with the basic items we would need to live there.

Your world is your neighborhood, and I was anxious to become familiar with our new world, starting with a two-block radius. I had gotten so caught up in the move, taking care of the boys and Steve, making sure everyone was fed and that our apartment was made livable, that I realized that first week that I hadn't even had time to examine the architecture!

The old buildings reflected architectural details and styles that you just don't get to see in the United States where nothing is more than 250 years old. The ancient city of Madrid offered classic beauty, rich history, and a diversity of people. It was so different! Yet, here we were, walking down the street, seeing people going to church, shopping, and enjoying meals. I couldn't help but acknowledge the similarities amongst the vast differences between Madrid and

Massachusetts. It then occurred to me that I was fully at ease with Madrid. I was living my dream. It felt warm and comforting, as if I'd finally come home.

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Our life was simple there. I would spend all day with our sons. We walked everywhere – to pick up a fresh loaf of bread, or to buy fruits and vegetables for the day. We went to the park. We went to the playground. We stopped in at a café.

We found our way through the narrow streets and met our new neighbors and shop owners. We made new friends at the park. The language barrier was a bit of an issue, but it didn't keep us from interacting with those in our new community. We were made to feel welcome by everyone we met. We were living on the street of a famous author, Lope de Vega. My priorities were my husband, our sons, and embracing everything that would nourish my soul.

When living in Massachusetts, I would feel very comfortable in our home. But, whenever I left our house, I felt somewhat disconnected from the neighborhood and people there. I also felt there was a tremendous pressure to get as much done as possible, as if all of life is focused on production. And, it wasn't just a lot of pressure on the adults. Even children are under a great deal of pressure to take on countless activities so they will be able to get into the best schools as they grow.

CHOOSING THE SIMPLE LIFE

As technology expands and we become more productive as individuals, we also become less connected to each other as people. I feel that many of us want to find the best, fastest, cheapest way to do things and, in the process, a lot is lost. This "rat race" is fine for some people, but I wanted to live a simpler life.

That's not to say that I don't appreciate our modern conveniences. I have to admit that dishwashers and washing machines for clothes

are wonderful inventions! And I'd be lost without my laptop. And, while cell phones bring with them annoying interruptions to our daily lives, I still relish a visit with my family and friends, where we can enjoy a homemade meal or a simple cup of tea.

I'm afraid that as we work to produce faster, more efficient results in all areas of life in the United States, we are becoming more and more disconnected to each other. This is disturbing because I feel it is these connections that are what matter the most. We are constantly being subjected to sensory overload. We can't even watch television without being interactive from our tablets. We don't even have to get up to check our email, not even if we are in the middle of another task. I feel that these countless distractions are toxins attacking our five senses and impeding our ability to think clearly or to be fully present in the moment.

I have traveled to more than 40 countries. I was deeply impressed by the simple living philosophies of the people I met in Serbia, Bosnia, and Croatia. It's something I wish people everywhere around the world could experience. These incredible people have

endured war and prison-like conditions in their own homes and in their own country during the Balkan Wars. Prior to the Balkan Wars, they had economic stability and access to the basic fundamentals needed to sustain life. But, during and since the war, they just pray for good health, clean water, bread, a roof over their heads, and the support of their communities, families, and friends.

These people were extremely resilient and creative despite the efforts of their enemies to keep them and their country down. They were willing to do whatever was necessary to live, survive, and provide for their families within the laws of their countries. I was even more impressed by the fact that of all the people I met who were living through these trying circumstances, not one of them ever complained about *anything* in their lives at that moment. In spite of the fact that many of them had lived through more than one war in their lifetime and they found themselves struggling to survive and provide for their most basic needs, often earning less than the average monthly salary of \$200.00.

I loved that Nicholas and Matthew - at their tender age of five years old - were more concerned about was Play Mobil pirates and parks than anything else that was going on around them. Through their eyes, I saw that they view the world as one. They never mentioned any differences in food, clothing, language, people, city, architecture, transportation, or anything that superficially appeared to be distinctly different from where they had lived until now.

Nicholas and Matthew were heading off to kindergarten in the fall of 2007. I recalled a book I'd seen, titled "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten" It is about treating people like they want to be treated. I am consumed with continuing to live an authentic life. While in Madrid, our apartment had no air conditioning, microwave, refrigerator, TV, phones, Internet connection or hot water. But, we did have easy access to clean, healthy water running from our faucets. I felt alive. I felt free. And without all the distractions we had at home in the US, I felt closer to our children than I had in a long time. I felt connected to this country, I felt connected to our neighborhood. I desired it all, the authentic living.

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While we were in Madrid, my high school graduation class would be celebrating its 20th year reunion. Since graduating in 1987, I had held more jobs than would fit a typical job application, had lived at more addresses than I was able to remember, and I had filled up all the pages in my passport twice. I felt that a reunion at this point in my life would not be a gentle walk down memory lane with old friends but, rather, it would seem to me at this point in my life to be more like going backwards to socialize with people from my life 20 years ago. I'd been through so much and had come so far that I felt this was a time to move forward. After "getting our toes wet" with our time in Madrid, Steve and I decided to take the plunge and make our move more permanent. We transferred our lives – our mail, our belongings and our hearts to Madrid.

Steve and I had always planned on living abroad. Now, with his career break, I knew he needed an extended rest. He'd had years of intensity that came with his fast-paced Internet security sales position. Nicholas and Matthew were

entering kindergarten, a resilient time in their lives, and children at that age are easily able to learn a foreign language. After careful consideration, we came to the conclusion: if not now, when?

Sunday was my favorite day in Madrid. The day is spent with family and friends, taking walks, enjoying conversation, sharing meals, and relaxing. We packed a homemade picnic lunch of crusty bread, fresh garden tomatoes and basil to layer with fresh slices of mozzarella. We would drizzle olive oil and balsamic vinegar over this salad caprese. We brought big bottles of mineral water to wash it all down.

Once we arrived at the front entrance of the Retiro Park, I was overcome with emotion. I was deeply in love with my husband, our sons, and the universe, and now I found myself in this park that appeared to be straight out of a fairy tale. What a gift! I felt like a princess. I heard the laughter of my family and our new friends. I felt the pure joy that came through the live Ecuadorian music the musicians shared. Even the trees looked peaceful and happy to be there. I hugged my family. Each said "I love you" as we embraced.

Being in the Retiro in Madrid is quite possibly my most favorite place on earth. When I am there, I feel as if I've transcended back to another time, one where there is a slower pace of life, where people connect deeply with one another, and the joy flows freely. I wanted to take in everything the day had to gift to me.

That first time at Retiro, we walked toward the left, closer to the water. We had our picnic lunches, an American baseball bat, gloves, balls, and blankets. We wanted to find a lovely spot with a full panoramic view of the water, but we were encapsulated by the serenity of old, old shady oak trees. We had barely laid out the picnic blanket and our lunch basket when the boys immediately set out to play baseball.

As they began to play, I walked over to the water. I felt the late summer sunshine on my face. I felt the energy of the sky. I wanted to immerse myself in the glowing happiness of the moment.

Steve, Nicholas, and Matthew played baseball. They played catch and fielded pitches. It was clear other people at the park were fascinated with their American baseball game, so

occasionally, a passer-by or two would stop and talk with Steve to ask questions about the game he was playing with the boys.

Steve loves to be an ambassador of the United States whenever he is traveling internationally. He is mindful to be genuine, real, and to leave a positive impression with everyone he meets. He enjoys being fluent in Spanish and even manages to do his best to speak to anyone in their native language because Steve has learned at least a few words in almost 50 languages. He was in his city, speaking his language, playing baseball with our sons, and chatting with the locals. It was the most perfect moment and I made sure I memorized every detail of that magical day.

When Matthew got tired of playing ball, he and I walked over to purchase a bag of fresh popcorn from a street vendor. We munched on the warm treat as we made our way over to the small lake, where we began to toss popcorn to the ducks that were there. Below the surface, we were able to see huge brilliant goldfish. This immediately took me back to amazing, wonderful memories of when I was little.

My mother had taken my brother and I to the *General Mills* headquarters location. There, on the grounds, we fed some ducks and goldfish. It was a powerful, positive memory, and here I was, replicating it with Matthew in another park, city, and country on a simple, authentic Sunday.

After our picnic, we took a leisurely stroll around the park grounds to enjoy the setting, the glorious weather, the live music, the street performers, and being together with one another.

Sundays in Madrid are timeless. We follow the flow of the day – from the sun arising until the moon illuminates the darkness of the sky. We walked as needed to move our bodies. We would eat whenever we felt the need to fuel our stomachs. We drank when we felt the need to quench our thirst. We hugged, laughed, sang and danced. That first day in Retiro Park had been a simple, authentic, and perfect day. I breathed it all in through every cell in my body.

THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY

The next day was August 14, 2007, my brother's first birthday after leaving this earth. I awakened rather early for a morning in Madrid - around 8:30am. I felt this journey etched in my skin. I sat at our table for eight in our new apartment in this foreign city and reflected on the fact that Chad would never again join us to celebrate a birthday, cheer the boys at their soccer games, attend a school concert, throw them a football pass, build a sand castle at the beach, hold their hands when they are sick, nurse their broken hearts, or provide them guidance on their soul's path. I could feel my body absorb this sadness. I started to feel all the pain and suffering my brother had endured in his physical body over the last ten years on this earth. I felt an incredible amount of physical pain and it became difficult to breathe. I knew that he was in such pain that he felt his only opportunity to escape his personal hell was to take his own life.

I felt a sense of loss and longing for his *physical* being, as if I'd lost a limb. I desperately wanted to hold his hand, share a laugh with him, and

enjoy his being here. I wanted to wrap my arms around him and hug him tightly. I wanted to look up into his gentle, loving, tender, sparkling electric blue eyes and see him look at me and tell me I was okay, he was okay, and that everything would be fine. I wanted to rub my index finger up and down his nose very gently like our Mother used to do to help us calm down and drift off to sleep. I craved him, his strength, his wit, and his tenderness. I want to connect with him, and to be with him.

I did my best to hide the tears that fell silently down my cheeks. I didn't want to alarm Steve or the boys. I finished my cup of green tea and went to shower off my sadness, attempting to compose myself for the day ahead. I had planned a day of nourishment, pampering, and self-care for myself, and allow time to connect with my late brother.

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I went to the *Museo Thyssen*, but there was a significant line of visitors waiting to get in, so I changed my plans. I went, instead, to the Prado.

Again, I saw a line of people waiting, and it was one of those times where I just didn't have the patience to stand in line, so I kept walking.

I paced in front of a Starbucks for a while before deciding to go in. I found myself incredibly homesick this morning, in stark contrast to the overwhelming joy I'd felt at being here just the day before. I was missing the familiarity of America, our home in Marblehead, and, of course, my brother.

I wanted to sleep in my own bed, on my own sheets. I wanted to water our garden, vegetables, and flower boxes. I wanted the whole family to sit on our big sofa in the family room and share a meal with everyone, feeling that sense that only a big family meal can deliver. We'd had a special handcrafted round dining table custom made for us in Chicago by a local craftsman and, whenever we gathered at that table, I felt my family was unified as one.

I surprised myself when I decided to go into the coffee shop. It was, at once, both familiar and foreign to me. I ordered a slice of tarta manzana - in honor of my brother's birthday - and a cappuccino. I waited for them to call my name,

which I loved hearing with a Spanish accent. Raquel is a common name in Spain and other Spanish speaking countries, and I feel a tremendous connection to the culture and country through my name. I found a plush purple velvet chair and sat down and eat my torte and drink my cappuccino. The apple torte had an abundance of chopped apples that were still very firm, a nice touch of cinnamon, many candied pepinos, and a modest thickness of graham cracker crust. I had a few sips of cappuccino, but I quickly realized that the combination of milk and caffeine had started to upset my stomach.

I observed the people, and the coming and goings within the coffee shop. A security guard was positioned at the front entrance. He was a smaller man, just about 5' 6" tall, Spanish, with a medium skin tone. He appeared to be physically fit and strong, and showed off his dark blue uniform very well. I noticed an earpiece in his left ear. He mostly stayed at the front part of the store near the entrance, keeping an eye on all the activity in and near the shop. He moved around a bit, and occasionally I caught him reading the local Madrid newspaper, *El Pais*.

I sat there, observing every detail. I heard a variety of languages being spoken in the shop and it sounded like smooth music. The beauty of the diversity was intoxicating. I was moved by the beat of soft jazz playing in the background. I noticed the laughter in the conversations outside at the patio, as people sat and looked across to the water fountain.

Perhaps I was suffering from sensory overload, but I realized that I now felt depleted and tired, and could hardly take a deep breath. This was an amazing city; it had the day-to-day energy of “Fat Tuesday” in New Orleans each and every day, was suddenly taking a toll on me. I wanted to go home, I wanted peace, I wanted to be able to breath, and I wanted to let go of my grief.

Just beyond the clear sliding glass doors of the coffee shop was a worn, dirty homeless man. He slept with his back to the people and his face to the wall away from the morning sunshine. In front of him was a small cardboard box for people to donate money to help him. I placed two Euros in is hand, though he doesn't seem to notice. As I stepped away from the man, I drew in a deep breath, focused on my awareness, and decided to do the best I could with where I

was and what I had at this very moment in time. I chose to simply “be.”

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Earlier in the week, Steve had made a reservation for me to spend some time at an authentic Turkish bath house on Calle de Athocha. He appreciated that I needed time to reflect, restore, and rejuvenate my mind, body, and soul. I arrived early and checked in. Upon arrival, I was given a detailed list of rules to observe while within the bathhouse. Once inside the women’s dressing room, I changed into my bathing suit and cozy white Turkish bath robe.

I alternated between plunges in the warm, cold and hot baths. I became most comfortable within the right side of the warm bath in the center of a middle pool. I loved the beautiful ceramics and surroundings. I imagined that this was very much like being in Istanbul. I immersed myself in the therapeutic waters in the center of the baths and felt water dripping from the ceiling onto the top of my head. It was a surreal moment that

made me feel peaceful and loved. I felt whole once again.

I slowly walked out of the waters and enjoyed the feel of the large, comfortable Turkish bath robe on my body. I went to the dressing room to change and freshen up for my lunch reservation at the adjoining restaurant. I sat down, hydrated with some bottled water, and then had an Andalusia menu of fried eggplant and a main course of couscous with white raisins, mixed vegetables, and a hot cup of tea. It had been a perfect afternoon.

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Steve and I had planned on spending the evening together remembering Chad, but it didn't quite go as expected. Being in Madrid is more about going with the flow and less about production, agendas, meeting and exceeding expectations.

We took a taxi to the Palace Cathedral where we planned to light candles for Chad and to

commemorate his birthday. We were able to enter into the cathedral, but they did not have traditional candles to light. They had a metal box with plastic battery-operated candles that required a coin to light. We dropped .20 Euros per candle. They flickered a few moments before coming to full strength and staying lit.

This modern version of lighting a candle in such an old, historic setting made the moment rather anti-climactic. We sat at the back of the church and each said a few words regarding Chad and his birthday. Matthew started to sing "Happy Birthday to Chad," and it was during the song that we became unclear and wondered, "If he would have actually been 34 physical years old, or would he now have a new birthday of September 12, 2006 when he left this physical earth?" I took a deep breath. My intuition said that his new birthday was the day he physically left this earth on September 12, 2006.