

# Introduction

Death happens to all of us. Some sooner than others. Those who are fortunate to live a long, healthy, happy life are the exception, not the rule. Knowing this, how do we react to the dying... to the death of a loved one? Do we shrink from it? Hide from it? Sink into the shadows of life, overwhelmed by the pain of the missing? Bury our grief, only to be haunted by it forever? Become outraged? Unforgiving? Fearful? Do we avoid people who have had a loved one die, afraid of saying the "wrong" thing, unable to heal the hurt... to stop the pain? Do we refrain from mentioning the person who died or sharing the memories with those who knew them? What do you call a mother who's child has died? An orphan? A widow? There is no word in our vocabulary that explains this to us... no thought as unthinkable as a child dying.

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross revolutionized the way we understand grief with her model for death and bereavement. The "Five Stages of Grief" (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) is a framework for each of us to experience. It is a flexible, not rigid, guide that we can use to lean on as we react to the death of a loved one. Like a fingerprint, each of us will experience grief differently; some will not experience a stage at all; others will revisit a stage again and again. There is no set pattern or timeline or deadline. Knowing ourselves and our emotions, allowing ourselves to truly feel, and being compassionate with ourselves moves us closer to the stage of acceptance. But there is something more, another way to not just endure, but transcend the experience of dying and ultimately death.

When I searched my heart for a title for this book, I wanted people to gain as much as I had from Amber. I thought of her, now an angel, and how with Bernie's help, I had come to—not only live through and cope with her dying and subsequent death—but actually *embrace* it. In this simple paradigm shift, I was able to cherish each moment, appreciate how good my life was with Amber in it, and see the reality of our life *after* her death. As a

result, I am living with no regrets for what I *should* have done or *should* have said. Amber's death continues to give me reassurance, joy, and a zest for life that I may have never known.

Throughout history, man has had a basic need to find the meaning in life and death... to see how we can utilize the lessons we are taught... to move our lives from acceptable to exceptional. I propose adding another stage to Elisabeth's cycle: To *embrace* dying and death... to move beyond simply *accepting* it and begin to incorporate it into our lives... to discover the power it holds and transform it in ways that propel us to move out of the shadows and live our lives in the light.

But I am just like you. I am human. I am fallible. I am doing the best I can with the life God has given me... with my time here on earth. To be sure, watching Amber suffer with cancer was unbearable and heartbreaking. It tore at my soul and crushed my spirit at times. After she died, I was determined to stop this from happening to anyone else... to remove this disease from our lives and place it in the history books, right next to polio. But I couldn't. I was a lone voice shouting into the wind.

People continue to get cancer; families continue to stand by and watch their loved ones suffer. My hope is that this book, that Amber's life and death, will change this fact... that it will transform thinking and unite all of us to prevent, treat, and cure cancer, in that order. Although *some* progress has been made, there is still much work to do to prevent cancer from taking its toll and eradicate it from our lives.

But more than cancer, this book is about how we can harness the power of tribulation and use it to shape our legacy and empower others. For me, cancer was the catalyst for a deeper insight into the human spirit and how we transform tragedy into triumph... the depths of despair into the heights of Heaven. Amber's courage, sense of humor, willingness to endure, and priceless wisdom is immortalized in these pages. Her incredible ability to see *good* despite the massive tumor that grew to nearly the size of her head, is a memory that turned my life around, that put my heartache in perspective. Each time I asked, "Amber, how do you feel?" she answered, "Good." How can I compare my own life struggles to that? I can't.

So, why did I write this book? And, how did I know I would do it even while I was living through Amber's cancer? What forced me to keep moving forward to get it published? Why didn't I just let her die... let this book die and move on with my life? How did I re-live this time in my life, to dig down and discover the hidden feelings, motivations, fears, and emotions? Why didn't I let cancer defeat me? How did I live through my daughter dying? What gives my life meaning? How do I carry on? I've asked myself these questions again and again as I searched for the answers and found them, but only after many years and much anguish. I am now at peace and can tell you Amber's story.

In August of 1979, while I stroked Amber's hair and lulled her to sleep, I discovered the small tumor that would transform our world. Since then, I have come to understand her "Life Task" on this earth: To live with cancer and through this journey, teach the world about love, courage, hope, the reality of "Heaven," and the power we possess. My "Life Task" was revealed to me slowly and oh, so painfully. God directed me. "Be at her side. Document her journey. Learn through your heartbreak. Bring Amber's message to the world."

It has not been easy to accept my fate. I have fought and resisted every step of the way. Though I have given up many times, God has not. He gently nudged me along, guiding each step and giving me the strength and fortitude to continue this mission. You may ask why.

There are four reasons why I didn't let Amber simply die and become a statistic. First, she was an extraordinary little girl—perfect in every way—*except* for the huge tumor that grew on and *in* her head. It was very graphic; not hidden somewhere inside her body; not easy to dismiss. I couldn't forget the *sight* of cancer, the sound of Amber pleading with God to make the pain stop, or the smell of the necrotic tumor as it ate away at my little girl. My senses are still reeling as I search my soul and call up the experience to complete the rewrite of this second edition.

Second, though my daughter was dead, I couldn't ignore the millions of people who have cancer *now*, nor its future victims and their families who live with the anguish. What about them? Who

will speak for them? They need a voice. What better than a child's voice? I can't let *them* become a statistic either.

Third, the "War on Cancer" that Nixon launched in 1971 has become a war amongst ourselves. The very people assigned to eradicating cancer are instead fighting with each other. As Dr. Samuel Epstein, cancer expert and author of *The Politics of Cancer*, says, "Winning the war on cancer means preventing cancer. Yet cancer is a multi-billion dollar business. Isn't preventing cancer bad for business? It is for the pharmaceutical and mammography businesses. These industries have intricate ties to U. S. policy makers, directing research funds to insure their continued profits in cancer diagnosis/treatment. It's time for reform. Congressional leaders are calling for an investigation of the U. S. National Cancer Institute for its indifference to cancer prevention, other than smoking, and for denying the public of its Right-to-Know, and for failing to inform Congress and regulatory agencies."

We are all guilty, more or less, of "turning a blind eye" to the people, especially the children, who are suffering. It is so incredibly unbearable, the mere thought of "CANCER" conjures up the most terrifying state we can imagine. It is a form of torture that no one would invite. Unless cancer is thrust upon us, we cannot invite it into our lives. As humans, this denial is a necessary tool to survive... a natural response to pain... a way to move on with our lives and truly live.

But we can't simply accept cancer and the pain and profit it produces, can we? The research community, citizen action groups, the medical establishment, business, alternative cancer groups, government, you and me; we all have some responsibility in this argument... this issue... this controversy of cancer. Hopefully, we will stop fighting long enough to listen to Amber and come together as one to resolve our differences, work to heal the wounds, and finally *prevent* cancer once and for all.

Fourth, I have no choice. I *must* complete my Life Task: To bring Amber's message to the world... to give you hope in the face of despair. It is why I was chosen. It is why I am on this earth.

I ask you now to read Amber's story. See her as your child... your friend, mother, father, sister, brother, aunt, uncle, grandmother, grandfather... your loved one who was touched by

cancer... yourself as you grappled with giving up and longed to surrender to despair. Amber is the symbol for cancer but, more importantly, she is the catalyst for change. As you will see, Amber is an angel, a sacrificial lamb, a messenger. Open your heart to her love, your mind to the world of cancer, and your spirit to embrace her.

As you embark on this journey with Amber and me, realize that you are not alone. We are all in the same boat of humanity. The tide has turned and we are caught in the current of change. Don't fight it. Relax and go with it, for God is at the helm. He is guiding you through the pain and the joy, the fear and the courage, the desperation and the hope contained in these pages. In the end, your life will be transformed, as was mine. Besides, it's too late to turn back. You have been touched by her, too.

I have given birth to the miracle of Amber. In this book, she resides. Her spirit and her message will give *you* that miracle... the proof of God's existence here on earth. When she died on my 27th birthday, she gave me a gift that will sustain me forever: *I physically felt God*. And now you are feeling Him, too, through these pages, the laughter and the tears, but most of all, deep in your heart and soul.

Just like Amber *was* my little girl and *is* my angel, God is real. *He* is "The Power" that resides in each of us, just waiting to be tapped... to be used for good—for ourselves and for everyone we meet while on this journey we call "Life," a journey we take together.