

Preface

In 1996, sixteen years after Amber died, the first edition of *Embrace the Angel* was published. It was the catalyst that propelled me to resume my "Cancer Crusade"... to speak for the millions who have been touched by cancer, wake up the world to its horrors, and shake the foundation of the "Cancer Industry." But it was my crusade, not Amber's, not God's. As time went on, I grew weary, tired of being in the "public eye," frustrated at the seeming indifference I encountered. My attempts were noble, but my methods were not. I was too angry, impatient, and unsettled. It took me a few more years to realize this and retreat into my life to find peace, happiness, anonymity, and contentment.

I focused on raising my son, Toby, varnishing boats for a living, and finally finding "The Man of My Dreams," John. Making the decision to pull out was easy. I needed to create space between me and the "Cancer World..." to enjoy a simple life filled with love and caring. Married for over ten years, we have enjoyed sharing our lives, creating a home (the "oasis" I always wanted) and spending time with family, friends, and Annie, our Jack Russell. I wallowed in the sweet, minute, simplicity of living my life day to day... of pulling weeds... of growing a garden... of tending to the birds and creatures in our yard. I also knew it could not last. Like instinct denied, I had to rewrite this book and return to the world to complete my "Life Task" of bringing Amber's message to the world, not carry on my "Cancer Crusade."

Another fifteen years passed before I would revisit the task of rewriting this book... before I would allow myself to dig down and resurrect my long-buried feelings and emotions. Gratefully, time and distance gave me much needed perspective, as well as the tools and skills to know myself... to understand the "how and why" of my time with Amber and the years that followed. I began to discover the deeper meaning of my actions, my decisions, and my emotions. Taking on a life of their own, they began to bubble up until I could no longer hold them in. I longed to tell you, the reader... to explain and define myself... to share the miracle of

Amber's life and her death... to give you the same gift she gave me: Her words of wisdom. "Live now and live life to the fullest, for 'now' is all we have. Do all you can to elevate others, for the power you possess must be shared. Leave this world knowing you have done your best to make it better—one smile, one embrace, one thoughtful gesture at a time. And when your time to crossover comes, use The Key to open the Gates of Heaven and enter the next world with open arms waiting."

I set up a studio in our spare bedroom, a place where I could finally assemble all of the materials I'd collected and stored. Knowing then that I would need them someday, I documented everything—from before Amber's birth to the moment she died. Everything. The letters, newspaper articles, movies, TV shows, drawings, photographs, audio tapes, and my journal were scanned and digitized. I secured the domain name, applied for the trademark, got a new computer with writing software, and suspended my professional organizing business, Organizing Made Simple. With preparations complete, I was ready to embark, once again, on Amber's journey. Unlike last time, *this* time, I went willingly. I knew that the only time I had was now, not later.

Reading the collection of letters I wrote to and received from well-known and accomplished people during my first crusade in 1984, my heart stopped at one. The words that Paula D'Arcy, author of *Song for Sarah*, wrote to me have finally come true: "You want to leave them (the reader) with knowing not just the details of your circumstances, but also feeling as if they know the ticking of your heart. The famous film director Elia Kazan said, 'To succeed as a writer, you have to be naked'." Finally, I was ready to disrobe. Baring my soul to the world and my heart to God, I took the plunge. I began to write... to give life to these words once more.

However, this book did not come easy. It is the product of thirty years of hard work, sacrifice, many revealing—and at times, unbelievable insights. I have risked a lot to bring Amber to you and this book to fruition. Opening up my heart, soul, and life to the world is unnerving and unnatural, almost scary. As you will see, the risk I took is small, nearly insignificant, compared to the tremendous suffering and loneliness that millions of people feel

when they are touched by cancer. But this is not a book about cancer. It is a book about miracles.

Embrace the Angel is the story of Amber's journey through cancer and into the world beyond. It is an opportunity to know her, understand her purpose, hear her words of wisdom, and believe in the power that dwells in each of us, just waiting to be tapped. It is also the story of one mother who learned, through her own childhood and then the death of her daughter, the importance of harnessing the power from deep within to overcome obstacles and transform grief into greatness. Yes, there are parts of it that are sad, emotionally draining, filled with anguish, and may prompt you to close the book. Some readers have told me that they could not pick it up again. That is okay. Amber's story simply invites, it does not demand.

There are also moments of courage, inspiration, and wisdom that will change the way you see the world, your life, and the trials and tribulations in it. Most readers find this book to be uplifting, genuine, spiritually gratifying, compelling. Many have told me that, once they begin reading, they cannot put it down until they've finished. They read right through the night. It becomes an experience of enlightenment, gratitude, awakening, and a connection to the divine. Their lives are changed forever and they, too, experience the miracle of Amber's life, and especially her death... her crossing over the threshold.

She knew she was dying, as most people do, and gave me the gift of a lifetime. Her last words have sustained me during the tough times and transformed me in ways I have yet to discover. "Mom, when I die, I'll still be Amber, I'll just be *different*." This is Amber's message to the world: Death does not delete our lives, it transforms them. Knowing that death is simply change, I did not "lose a child," she did not "pass away." She is still with me today, but *different*.

Thank God I have stayed open to "see" her in all her many forms—butterflies, a falling leaf in the woods, people—especially children—dragonflies, and Annie. Each one a container for Amber's spirit. Each one a miracle on its own. And the miracles never stopped.

For months, I spent hour upon hour scanning the negatives and photographs that chronicled my journey with Amber. I was driven to tell the story that these words alone cannot. The images, some of which I hadn't seen in thirty years, returned me to that time of power, helplessness, joy, and sadness. It was a heavy weight to bear and I was only human. I needed to get past scanning the negatives of her death, to a place of recovery and healing, to the time when we returned to the Bahamas to collect our things. I worked night and day.

Finishing the last group of negatives late one night, I sat down at my computer to review the photos. My eyes landed on one: A black and white taken the day before she died. It was a close up of the right side of her head, the side of her tumor. I was transfixed. The tumor had grown so large, it nearly obscured her head and hid her beautiful face. I was stunned, on the verge of disbelief, but *had* to believe my eyes. Cancer was real and this really happened. It could not be denied.

"There was as much *inside* her head as outside. It was eating my baby alive!" I buried my head in my hands and wept. "The horror... the horror of it all," I cried again and again. After years of holding on, I finally released the anguish of watching all that Amber went through... of watching my little girl die. "How did she do it? How did she live through this and *always with a smile?*"

When my tears had drained away, I washed my face and quietly got into bed, feeling John's warm body and hearing him breathe deeply. "He's asleep," I thought. I lay back and opened my eyes. It was autumn and the wind was swirling the leaves around as they fell from the trees. They mixed with the rain that fell from the night sky.

My eyes focused closer. On the outside of the skylight window above our bed, leaves had landed in a big "Happy Face" smile. But one leaf was missing. It was on the other side. It looked like a tear. I heard a familiar voice. "Mom, it's okay to cry. Just remember, when you cry out all your tears, you have to put the last one back to complete your smile." Amber continues to teach me with her words of wisdom... to show me the meaning of life and love.

Our tears are like liquid love. We cry because we feel. And we feel because we care. Caring for someone you love is a miracle to savor... a gift from the heart. This gift is Amber. Hold her in your arms. See her with your eyes. Keep her in your heart. For you are meant to listen, to understand, to embrace her words of wisdom... to truly know the meaning of life and your time here on earth.

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