

THE QUESTIONS I WISH I COULD ASK

by Shelby Sandford

A common phrase that I'm sure we've all heard is "It gets easier with time." Although it is true that the grieving process is not linear, I have found that as more time passes and as I mature, the grieving process has become more difficult.

When my brother Jimmy died I was nine, I was a child. When I was nine years old, I knew what I liked to do. However I didn't know what my passions were in life – most children at that age don't. I had my friends, dance, I liked to read and draw. Although I know he really liked me, those things aren't really relatable to a 30-year-old man. To me, Jimmy was the coolest babysitter ever. I remember racing him in his backyard, and unlike the other adults, he never let me win. I remember roughhousing and calling him "Jungle Jim" as I hung off of him like a little monkey. As a positive older influence in my life, Jimmy was as good as it gets. But we weren't friends yet, because I was too young.

Now at 22 years old, I find myself stopping in my tracks sometimes and thinking, "Wow, I am a lot like Jim." So many parts of our personalities are the same; we just didn't know it yet.

I find solace in really difficult hikes, the sweaty ugly ones. I find reward in the work that comes with being strategically prepared, down to the last freeze-dried snack. I know that Jimmy was an all-season up-north camper. I've seen the pictures and heard so many stories, but I find myself wanting to ask him why he liked it so much. I wonder, was it the challenge? Did he winter camp because it was harder and more rewarding, or was it just easier to get his buddies together then? Did being outside and surrounded by the wildlife give him the same feeling that it gives me? It's hard to put that feeling into words, but if we both got it, we'd know.

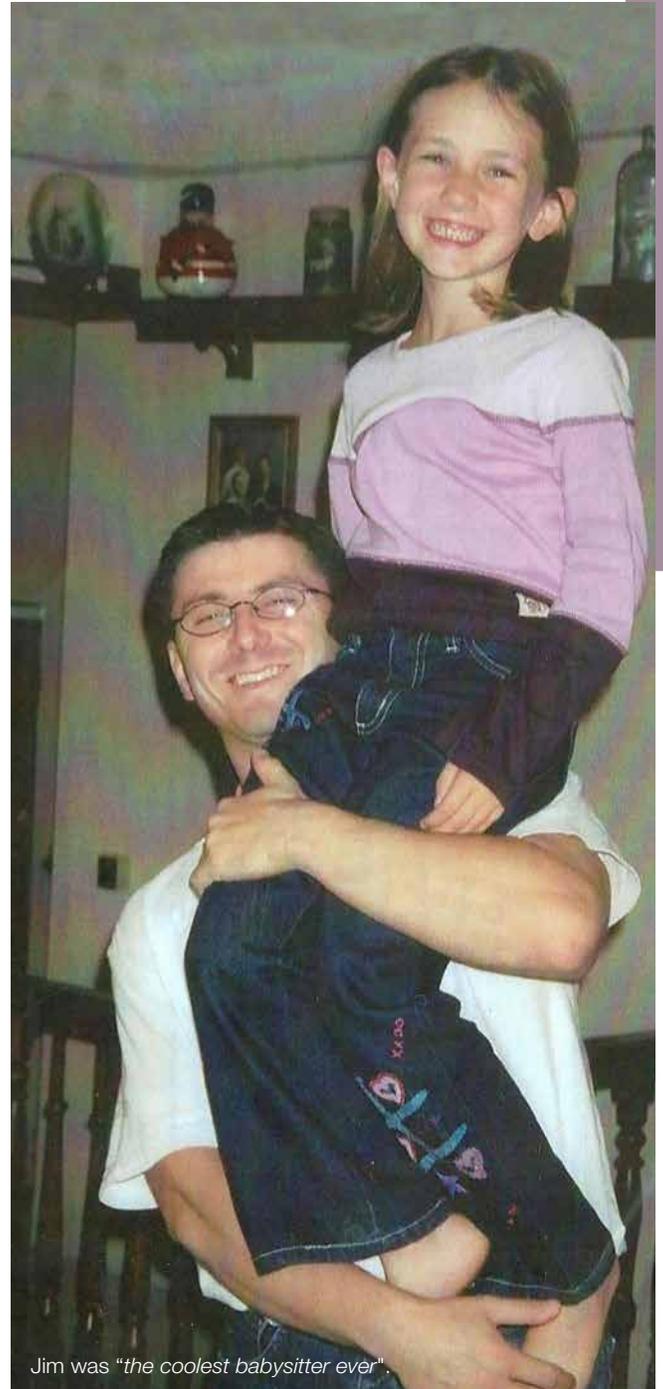
When Jimmy was around I knew I liked reading and writing; I loved school. But now I know that I have a constant desire to read more, learn more, and just take in more. I hear Dad talking about Jim's thirst for learning new things, and again wonder "why?" You don't often hear about someone who genuinely loves going to school.

Did he get the same feeling as me when a new thing clicked? Was he driven to expand his mind and grow as a person? These weren't conversations I was old enough to have, at the time.

When he passed, my grief counselor inspired me to go to Western for psychology and become a counselor myself. Twenty years prior to me, Jimmy also got a Social Science BA degree from Western. I remember in my first year anthropology class we discussed gift giving for holidays and how it can be problematic. I came home for a break and told Mom that I wasn't sure if I wanted to do presents that year for Christmas. She told me that when Jimmy was in school, he also came home and said he didn't want presents, he wanted that money to go towards charity. So badly I wish I could talk to him about that. Did he take the same course? Was it that class that changed his opinion, or something else? What other courses stuck with him and changed his worldview? Was he lost when he graduated, too?

When we talk about our grief, we often speak of the things that we miss out on as individuals. For me, I'm missing bonding over these connections with him. Aside from my own individual loss, Jim is missing out too. He's missed out on his grown up little sister, who doesn't need a hot and ready pizza and a rented movie to be entertained. I feel like with the similarities that are so deeply rooted in our personalities, Jim and I would be genuine friends.

I love Threads of Life so much because it's stressed that although we are all here with common ground, no loss is the same. My own individual loss differs from that of the rest of my family, but it has also changed over time, as I grow older without him. When I was younger, I had lost my



Jim was "the coolest babysitter ever".

big brother who was my favourite babysitter and was such a good role model. Now, I have lost a friend who would truly understand me.

I am so thankful for Threads of Life serving as an outlet for me over the years, as I have grown from a child to an adult. My grieving process is a journey that I will be on forever, and it's really hard to put into words how thankful I am that Threads of Life will be there with me...but you guys get it.