

JOURNEY TO THE RAINBOW

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Journey to the Rainbow

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JOURNEY TO THE RAINBOW

LOUISE SUZANNE BOYD

Journey to the Rainbow

My girl's on a spiritual journey
An important quest
No turning back now!
And she cannot rest!
She may sometimes feel weary
And will want to sleep
And forget the pain that still runs deep
It sometimes cuts her like a knife
But this is the most important
Journey of her life-

Yes, she may stumble
But she will not fall!
For the spiritual powers are there
When they hear her call...
So with sleepy eyes
My girl finds the strength to carry on
And somehow the road
Doesn't seem as long!
She will not give up
Her soul leads the way
"Oh, the rain has stopped"
I hear her say
And then what a wondrous
Sight in the sky
Brilliant arc of colors up high
Her tears are drying now
And smiling, she bravely lifts
Her face to the sun
Knowing her journey to the rainbow has begun.

Amanda Jane Penny

*The risk of love is loss,
And the price of loss is grief
But the pain of grief
Is only a shadow
When compared with the pain
Of never risking love.*

-

Hilary Stanton Zunin

PROLOGUE

After the rain stopped and my tears finally dried, the sun came out to warm my face. When I looked up I noticed a beautiful bright rainbow appearing in the sky. It was at that precise moment I knew that my journey had begun...

As I saw Elianna crawl out from the bathroom that day I started shaking. I could not believe my own eyes. My child, crawling on her hands and knees, saying, "Help me, help me" Was this some kind of dream I was in? I yelled loudly to my husband, "Something isn't right here, something isn't right!" I felt so helpless seeing my precious daughter struggling to get to the living room. My motherly instincts started to kick in and it was then I called 911.

Since losing Elianna I have gained so much strength and spiritual insight that it truly has been not only a turbulent journey but an enlightened journey where I am finding my inner peace and a connectedness to the soul. Love will always remain between my dear daughter and I because love is stronger than death.

We are to face many tests in our lifetime where emotions and feelings pour out of us like an ongoing waterfall. Sometimes this waterfall continues but then after a while the flow of the water lessens, but it never actually stops. Sometimes there is a drip here and there of tears that will always flow but nowadays I can smile despite my tears and

carry on with my life and to raise the family as best I can.

Our family has experienced many changes that we have had to adapt to since my daughter's passing, but the most important of all is that knowing death is just a transition from this world to the next. Death is just the beginning and that Elianna is alive. People don't die - only their physical bodies die as the soul lives on.

Every time the tree at the school shows its beautiful leaves in the fall, we are reminded of her. I lost something extraordinarily special the day the angels took her away, but I gained much wisdom and strength thru my spiritual journey.

I have learned that life is about balance and we have to face the good with the bad and to take these life experiences by helping others.

Growth within us is the reason why such experiences and tragedies happen. Knowing about something is one thing, but actually experiencing it is another. We tried to make sense of Elianna's passing and that her life here was fulfilled in one sense and that she had to leave for reasons known by the higher powers. In time, I accepted her passing and by doing so I grew because of experiencing grief first-hand. We learn from these experiences through spiritual knowledge and we turn the sadness into smiles and wisdom. The void Elianna left behind is filled by spiritual thoughts and

prayers which comforts me and are still helping to heal my family and me today.

She was loved and cherished and lived 12 years to the fullest. The zest and energy she put into those years live on still in all those around her today. The tree the school dedicated to Elianna bares beautiful red leaves each fall, a reminder to me of her wonderful chestnut-red hair; the tree is a poignant reminder - as it blossoms and grows – that life really goes on. There may be life-changing situations but there is never an end to life, it is just a continuous cycle.

Chapter 1

Elianna

And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years.

-

Abraham Lincoln

We will always remember Elianna, the young girl with the radiant smile and the most beautiful mane of red hair. She had a caring heart and inner beauty that sparkled within and radiated on the outside. So many beautiful attributes Elianna portrayed and yet never in a million years would we even have the slightest idea she would leave this earth so very suddenly. Nobody is invincible, although we like to think we are. Situations arise when we least expect them to and these situations can turn our lives around full circle. Nothing has ever been the same again, but since her tragic and untimely passing I have gained many good spiritual thoughts and the unwavering support of immediate family and friends. Even a hug from a stranger in empathy for my loss has come to mean so much to me. I lost my girl but gained great comfort, love and understanding in her place.

I remember Elianna growing up her first laugh, losing her first tooth, her first step and the first day she started pre-school and then two years later she was off to kindergarten. Elianna was always loved

and protected. A little voice inside kept telling me that love is the most important quality you can give a child. I felt in my heart that my job was to be home with her and to be the best nurturing mother I could possibly be.

Elianna Raine Boyd was a much loved and respected girl, both in our family and at school. We miss her terribly. It has been a difficult 2 ½ years without Elianna. I miss seeing Elianna still and the way she used to laugh. I miss brushing her thick red hair. I miss watching her holding her sister's hand in a comforting way; how she used to cuddle up to her favorite dog, Ace; and being a role model to her brother and sister. I also miss watching her play barbies with her sister, Jessica.

I miss kissing her on the cheek when she leaves for school in the morning and her warm hugs. I miss her laughter and her smile. I miss seeing the distinct mark on her front teeth when she laughs and I also miss hearing her sing in the shower. I also miss her caring attitude she had towards other people.

She loved her friends and having sleepovers. It is painful for me to see Elianna's classmates becoming teenagers but I do take comfort in the fact that Elianna is growing spiritually, each and every day. Although I may be sad that she isn't here with us, she is only a heartbeat away and I know she sees us all too, as we talk of her and all the things she did and said. I remember her being proud of the fish she caught a couple of weeks before she passed and

the memory makes me smile a lot. She was close to nature and loved animals. I like to think of Elianna as living and learning as a spiritual being in a peaceful dimension, where love exists and pain does not.

Elianna loved school and all her teachers. She loved drama and took pride in involving herself in various school activities which were offered. She was smart and she was a good role model to her fellow students as well as to her brother and sister. She inspired me in so many ways. One quality she had was not ever worrying about what people thought. I wished in so many ways I could inherit this trait myself. Elianna would get things done in a plain and simple manner and would move on where most of us would sit around dwelling on certain situations. She didn't have to prove herself because she was content with who she was. I always felt that Elianna was an old soul because I learned so much from her. Sometimes I felt like the child and she was the adult. She would never involve herself in cliques. I raised her to try and get along with everyone and she did. Sometimes she would tell me this and that and I would get annoyed. She would say, "Don't worry mom, no big deal."

I remember the time when she excitedly told me she got the part of Kendra in the school play, *Whining and dining at the snack and yak*. She had previously looked at the script and prayed she would get the part of Kendra. Elianna was suited to playing Kendra. She pulled it off so well and her dad and I

were so proud to watch her on stage. Her confidence shone through and she became our shining star. After every drama practice Elianna would go up to her drama teacher, Mrs. Kofron and thank her, which was unusual for a girl of 10. She really and truly appreciated being part of the drama club and it shone through during rehearsals and also when she was on stage.

Elianna was especially happy when she got the role of Lady Alisande in *King Arthur's Court*. This was a coveted role and the teacher said that Elianna would fit the role perfectly, which she did, with her assured manner and wonderful red hair.

At home she loved to decorate cakes and bake cookies, something most children like to do. She loved going to McDonald's for ice cream and particularly enjoyed her smoothies.

Elianna would love to bounce on the trampoline with her friends and siblings; always having fun. She was such a bright spark and impossible to forget.

One day I remember her treading on dog poop in the back yard, not something any of us would want to experience, but she was laughing hopping around on one foot telling her dad to wipe her foot to get rid of the mess. She always found a bright side to life which was quite refreshing.

When she was much younger she used to love picking up bugs and creepy-crawlies that nobody

would dare touch. She would pick up huge caterpillars and frogs without flinching, and marvel at them, showing the adults around her, what she had found. She was in harmony with nature and of course did not think it was squeamish or gross, picking them up. She seemed so amused and fascinated, always such a bright and happy girl!

She loved swimming in the family pool and would stay in the pool for hours. She would lie on the float and listen to the comforting sound of the water lapping around her, without speaking, her lovely clear eyes closed, and a hint of a smile on her young face. I often wonder now what was going on inside her young head.

Elianna was never particularly fond of picking out her own clothes for school. Many times it was too bothersome for her so I had to do it. She wasn't really interested in fashion like most girls of her age, she did not really care, as long as she was clean and comfortable with what she was wearing then she was happy. Comfort was more important to her than looking good.

She was the reason I decided to go back to school. I know she was proud of me. She once told me that if I tried hard enough, it can be done. What an encouraging remark to say coming from a 10 year old. She never gave up herself and succeeded in everything she did because she put her mind to it like just like she was telling me too.

She was a shining light in everyone's eyes and she touched everybody. Such a bright spark she was, and just impossible to forget! Elianna wasn't perfect but she was close to it.

Looking back, Elianna never wanted to be alone. I asked her a couple of times when she was around 12 years old if she would mind staying home alone just for half an hour so I could run to the store. She never ever liked the idea. She would tell me "no" right away. I didn't want to argue with her because to me this wasn't something really worth arguing about so I just let it be.

When I think back, I often wonder that underneath she knew something was going to happen, an inner voice deep routed in her soul, a "knowing" something bad may happen if she were suddenly left in the house on her own? We will never know but looking back, I am so glad that I never did leave Elianna on her own in the house, and that I was always there for her during her 12 years, which is quite a long time, the thought of which still comforts me today.

Chapter 2

Hoping for a Miracle

*Go within every day
and find the inner strength
so that the world will not blow
your candle out.*

-

Katherine Dunham

Monday August 8th, 2011 was the day my mom would arrive from England. She would fly out here every summer to visit us. I always looked forward to her visits because they were very special. She would bring a suitcase full of English chocolate, cookies and cakes. The kids would hover around with anticipation while their grandma unpacked. My mom was supposed to arrive here the middle of July but she had to go in for minor surgery so her vacation had to be re-scheduled for Monday. This day was also our 13th wedding anniversary.

Since we had to pick up my mother from Chicago airport around noon, my husband Dan decided to take the day off work and stay home with us so we could all go to the airport together. Looking back I was very glad we were all there on that fateful day, united as a family.

On that particular morning I was pottering around the house and doing a few last minute preparations.

The kids were watching television and Elianna was upstairs showering. After her shower she came downstairs and decided to play Barbies together with her younger sister, Jessica. Around 10:30 Elianna came into the living room and told me she had a slight headache and that the left side of her body felt numb. I didn't think anything about it. I figured she had pins and needles from sitting on the floor playing Barbies and for the headache, well I decided to give her a Tylenol and a glass of water. I assured her everything would be ok and to just relax for a little while before we had to make our trip down to Chicago to pick up my mom.

I sat down on the couch beside her and then she asked me to hold her hand. Once in a while Elianna would ask me to hold her hand if she wasn't feeling too well. Dan came over by her and asked how she was doing. She didn't say too much because she really didn't really know what was going on. After a minute or two she then started complaining of a stomach ache. I looked at Dan with a blank stare not knowing what to say.

All of these symptoms came on so very suddenly and we didn't know what to make of it. Suddenly, Elianna hurriedly got up from the couch and ran to the bathroom. She started throwing up. I didn't know what to make of this and said, "Elianna are you ok? Are you ok?" I felt helpless. We had to leave in an hour to go to the airport and it didn't look like Elianna would be able to make it to the

airport as sick as she was. She stayed in the bathroom for a couple of minutes.

I stood outside the bathroom waiting for her to come out when all of a sudden the door slowly opened and she came crawling out on her hands and knees. She crawled to the living room and shouted, "Help me, help me." I started shaking. I stood there in disbelief. Dan and I could not believe what we were seeing or hearing. We were both standing there not knowing really what to do. We were looking at one another almost in a state of shock trying to comprehend what was truly going on. Elianna was fine 20 minutes ago and now she was shouting for help.

I then suddenly had the presence of mind to call 911. Although I could feel my voice shaking with fear, I bravely did what I had to do. I shouted to Dan, "Something isn't right here, something isn't right!" I started feeling a sense of panic. Both Jessica and Daniel didn't know what was going on and were too young to understand and just stared helplessly at their dear sister wishing they could somehow help.

Dan hurriedly went over to her and helped her on the couch but then she somehow fell off the couch onto the floor and threw up once again. Daniel took a pillow and propped her head up as she lay on the floor. After I hung up with 911, I started to notice that she was beginning to get weaker and her eyes started to close. Suddenly her head gently went

from side to side and she said, "I don't want to die, I don't want to die." I said to her in a panic-stricken voice, "Elianna, don't be silly! You are not going to die. You'll be ok, we promise. I just called for the rescue squad and they are on their way." I told her not to go to sleep and stay awake. She then suddenly had a slight seizure as she started to drift off into unconsciousness. This was very traumatic for everyone but we didn't know why. Fear started to grip me, my insides turned to jelly and I felt myself shaking from head to toe.

Dan cleared everything out of the way to ensure the rescue squad had easy access into the house. He ordered Jessica and Daniel to lock the dogs away upstairs. It was chaos. I remember pacing up and down, glancing at Elianna and telling her she will be ok. Confusion set in as I found it difficult to understand why this suddenly came about, just out of the blue. I had my hands on my head thinking, *oh no what is going on, what is going on, please God do not let anything happen to her, please.* I was in panic mode besides being in a state of shock because we didn't know what was happening. We just felt so helpless. We wanted to help her so badly but we couldn't. I kept praying in my head for God's help. Dan bent down over her and tried to talk to her and told her to keep her eyes open and to not fall asleep. I ran outside to the end of the drive way to look out for the rescue squad. I started to cry a little as I was walking back up the driveway. I looked up to the sky and shouted, "Please God watch over Elianna and don't let anything happen to her, I beg you!" I

started shaking a little more and ran inside the house again desperately wanting to know what was going on, pacing up and down and feeling panic-stricken. A few minutes later the rescue squad arrived. I knelt down by Elianna and said, "Help is here Elianna, and they will take care of you." She heard me because her head moved and her lips slightly moved as if she was trying to get the words out. I then said, "You will be ok Elianna." As one of the first responders knelt down by Elianna they asked Dan and I what had happened. I hurriedly spoke of the circumstances surrounding the sudden decline of my daughter. The lady told Elianna to try and stay awake. She asked Elianna for her name, and I heard my daughter mumble, "Elianna Boyd" but her voice became faint. They also asked her who the president was. She said in a very weak voice, "I don't know." Elianna was going into a deeper state of unconsciousness. She was able to mumble a few words but also it seemed like she was losing consciousness very rapidly. Never would I have thought this would be the last time I would hear my daughter's dear voice.

As soon as the rescue squad left the house I dropped Jessica off at a neighbor's house and I then followed the ambulance to the hospital. Dan and Daniel left to go to the airport to pick up my mom.

I really don't remember following the ambulance. I felt like I was in another state of mind. I kept praying and praying that everything will be ok.

Upon arriving at the hospital I was ushered into a small waiting room. I sat there in disbelief. I felt so numb and confused. Once again, I bowed my head into my hands thinking, *please God help Elianna, don't let anything happen to her please, please.* I must admit I felt very frightened sitting there alone with so many thoughts running through my mind. What we had experienced was unforgettable because this happened so very, very quickly.

Several minutes later, the ER doctor came into the room with a sorrowful look on his face. He sat down directly across from me and without mincing words; he told me that Elianna was bleeding in the brain. They had already performed a cat scan which showed signs of hemorrhaging and that flight for life were on their way to fly her immediately to children's hospital for surgery. I could not believe what I was hearing. I could feel my heart racing and my breathing had become shallow. I couldn't really get my words out because the news hit me hard. I started to shake.

How is this possible, I thought to myself? I wished so hard that this was a bad dream and that I would wake up any minute. The ER doctor asked me if I would like to see her before they flew her to Children's Hospital. I remember standing up in a confused state as he led me out of the room and took me to her. At that time I felt like the beginning stage of shock. None of this made any sense to me. Elianna was perfectly fine a couple hours ago I thought and now she was unresponsive.

There were many nurses surrounding Elianna's hospital bed preparing her for the flight to Children's Hospital. I was able to go by her and I whispered in her ear that I loved her and stroked her head. I started crying because it was so very difficult to look at her this way.

This wasn't Elianna. Elianna was the bright, cheerful girl I knew, not someone lying unconscious in a hospital bed. As I looked at her with tears pouring down my cheeks, I was still in disbelief. I told her that I loved her and that everything will be ok. I know she heard me. I feel this in my heart and in my soul. I just stood back and stared, so many thoughts and emotions were running through me and I was so afraid and very confused. I had to call Dan to tell him the bad news however, I was very reluctant to call since he was driving home on the highway from Chicago and I certainly didn't want him to go into some kind of shock and end up in an accident. I decided to wait a little but it was too painful for me to wait any longer and I just had to call him. Elianna was our first born child and she meant the world to us. All of our children mean so much to us both but telling Dan of our daughter's situation and that it had become life threatening would be something he wouldn't be able to fathom either.

I was quick and tried to be positive when I spoke with him although it was extremely difficult. He could hear that I was clearly upset and frightened. I know my mom knew something had happened since

she could hear Dan's response to me on the phone. Even for her it was something that she could not wrap her head around and flying all this way at 76 was enough, never mind hearing about her granddaughter suddenly being rushed to hospital. How could she fathom that? In fact how could any of us fathom it? I was amazed how together Dan sounded on the phone. I guess he had no choice. He had to savor every bit of strength in order to make his way to the hospital. I felt that the good spiritual powers were watching over him and that they were helping him with his pain and disbelief.

I called a friend of mine, Chris. Her daughter and Elianna had become friends over the summer and were in the same grade at school. Chris had just graduated from nursing school and she was the type of person who would help someone in a dire situation. She had that quality about her. I called her to tell her what had happened to Elianna and she immediately dropped everything and came to the hospital. When she arrived, I hugged her. Chris also appeared to be shocked. In the mean time I had to sign necessary documentation for the physician and the nurse to escort Elianna to Children's Hospital by helicopter. I don't remember reading the paperwork because I was so shaken at the time, all the writing on the forms became one long blur. Chris and I spent a few minutes talking to the flight crew and then immediately we left to go to Children's Hospital. I literally felt helpless like a person at sea with no anchor in sight.

The car ride seemed like it took forever. Both Chris and I tried to think positively but it was very difficult. Several minutes before we arrived at Children's Hospital, one of the flight crew members called me on my cell phone to tell me that Elianna was already in surgery. I remember feeling a small sense of comfort when they told me because I knew Elianna was in good hands, however, what I didn't know was that this was the beginning of something I would never, ever imagine could happen to our precious daughter.

Soon after arriving at the hospital, we were given directions to the waiting room. As we walked in to this large room, I was surprised to see many other families sat around waiting on the news of their children. There seemed to be a lot of interaction and some laughter which eased the atmosphere somewhat. Chris and I walked over to one of the empty tables and sat down. I told her how much I appreciated her driving me to the hospital because I would never have made the journey alone since I felt disoriented and that my mind had been clouded over with panic and worry. I was very happy she was there for me at that moment and I felt comforted by her presence.

Sometime later Dan walked in with Jessica, Daniel and my mom. I was very happy to see my family. I tried to embrace my mom with a big hug but it was difficult to really embrace her and welcome her because my mind was focused on Elianna. After some time, one of the doctors walked into the

room, hesitantly looking around and said in somewhat of a quiet tone "Boyd family." Dan and I looked at one another. I took one long deep breath, as we both stood up and then we followed the doctor into a private room. Chris and my mom stayed with Daniel and Jessica. At that moment in time I remember feeling like I was in some horrible dream and I hoped I would wake up soon. I was so afraid. My mother had just arrived! Why weren't we chatting excitedly at the airport instead of being at the hospital bracing ourselves to hear what we didn't wish to hear?

Dan and I were led into a very tiny room. I was scared as to what the doctor would have to say. As we entered into the room and sat down, the doctor looked at us with a very sullen expression. Dan and I sat across from him waiting in anticipation. I could feel my heart racing so quickly that I felt like it was going to explode out of my chest. Anxiety started to set in within those few seconds waiting for the words to come out of his mouth. The neurologist started to explain very briefly about the surgery and what they tried to do. He sounded very quiet, calm and collected. He told us since there was blood in the brain from the hemorrhage; the cranium had started to swell due to the access build up of cerebrospinal fluid. This build up of fluid could lead to intracranial pressure which could crush the brain tissue.

Then, the dreaded words were spoken. He said softly and hesitantly, "Elianna is.... I'm afraid

Elianna is deep in the woods. There is very little chance she is going to make it." "Nooo!" I cried, my heart literally sinking into my stomach. I felt like I was going to be sick. I remember hanging my head looking at the floor in such a daze. My mind had gone completely blank. Dan's hand started shaking, I grabbed his hand very tightly which was the only comforting thing I could do in such a dire situation. Holding hands was a small comfort for Dan and me. This couldn't ring true I thought, this is impossible. I remember thinking, *why, why would this happen to her? I don't understand. Why wouldn't our daughter make it?* Then during all this sadness and confusion a little voice popped into my head telling me that the doctor didn't say that she wasn't going to make it but he said that there would be a little chance so in my mind there was still a glimmer of hope, which was all we had to cling to during those long dark days.

Chapter 3

When the Angels Came

*And if I go, whilst you're still here...know that I live on,
vibrating to a different measure behind a thin veil...*

Colleen Corah Hitchcock

We were told Elianna would be residing in the ICU. She would be cared for by a team of highly trained nurses and doctors who are trained in neurology and critical care. They provided the highest level of intensive care and monitoring so we knew Elianna was in safe hands.

While we were all waiting, I was allowed to use the phone to call overseas to speak and to inform my dear sister, Mandy what had happened. I tried to tell her as much as I could but I didn't know too much myself as to what was happening. When I told her she was very shocked like the rest of us. My sister came over to visit us the year before and bonded with the kids well during her short visit. She had several conversations with Elianna and commented to me what a lovely young girl she had become. She always thought that Elianna seemed like an "old soul." And that she was a wise young lady for only 12 years old.

Mandy tried her utmost best to be positive during the call and it kind of helped a tiny bit but it was still difficult and I was still too upset. I told her I would

call her the next day and that I would keep her updated as to what was going on. It was hard for me to put the phone down but there isn't too much a person can do when they are 4,000 miles away except pray.

After some time of anxiously waiting, one of the nurses came in to the waiting room and told us we could go in to see her. Dan, the kids, my mom and Chris followed the nurse into the ICU.

My eyes suddenly started welling up with tears as we walked into her room and then I started to cry a little when I glanced over at our dear daughter. She appeared so helpless and vulnerable. I knew deep within me that I had to stay strong and positive after all, I know even though Elianna was in a comatose state, she could hear us. It was important we sent good thoughts and prayers her way. It was very difficult seeing her laying there with all these tubes around her. She was hooked up to the ventilator because she was unable to breathe on her own. She also had an IV and an ICP monitor. The ICP monitor measures brain pressure which helps know the level of consciousness of the patient. There were EVD tubes inserted in her head to drain the excess fluid from her brain. The arterial line was used for the doctors and nurses to monitor blood level. There were so many tubes all over the place that I could not begin to explain. Seeing Elianna this way was very overwhelming and upsetting for all of us. We clung to the tiniest ray of hope because as long as there is hope there is life and this is what we

needed to believe in especially during those terrible lonely hours, sitting and talking to our dear daughter and holding her hand.

My mom was especially fond of her first granddaughter and was devastated and found it also incomprehensible to see her in this state, hooked up on the hospital bed, her eyes closed laying there with no movement. My poor mom was never to see Elianna chatting and laughing again, so she sat with me, supporting me as we talked to Elianna for hours stroking her arm and her face. Elianna was never alone during this terrible time, which is indeed a source of comfort for me today.

During this difficult time my mom and I were allowed to stay with Elianna in the same room. Dan took the kids home and he was to return early the next day. My good friend Chris offered her support too and told us that she would be back the following day also.

It was hard for Dan to leave Elianna as each evening she lay in such a critical state but again, we tried to stay positive hoping for a miracle.

The first night was so difficult. I never slept, and I felt sick to my stomach with worry. I lay on the couch with my eyes closed praying in my head for Elianna to get better. I would constantly hear the ventilator machine and the whispering voices of the nurses as they helped look after our dear daughter throughout the night. I would stand by Elianna's

bedside, stroking her arm, telling her that everything will be ok and that everyone is praying for her to get better. It was strange seeing Elianna's chest rising up and down, yet she was in a very deep comatose state. She looked like she was sleeping soundly, yet it was strange for me when I whispered in her ear and didn't get a response such as a nod or something of that nature. The doctor and the nurse would quietly come into the room checking her vital signs. Constant care was needed for Elianna because of the delicate condition she was in.

In the early hours of Tuesday morning the team of neurologists who were assigned to Elianna met in the conference room discussing Elianna's condition. In the meantime, I had the critical care nurse call for the chaplain because I really needed spiritual support as I felt so distressed. Dan and the kids wouldn't be here for another hour. My poor mum couldn't do anything as she was in shock also. She could not comprehend the situation and didn't know what to do; in fact none of us could comprehend the situation.

After a few short minutes the chaplain walked in. I breathed a sigh of relief to see her because I knew she would give us both peace and comfort by praying for Elianna and hoping that God will bless Elianna and help her in any way he could. My mom, the Chaplain and I held hands and prayed over Elianna's bedside. It was very spiritual. I felt a little more reassured after the prayer. We talked to

the chaplain a little after we prayed and I felt a peace in the room.

I continuously kept stroking Elianna's hair and stroking her arm and whispered, "We are praying that you will get better and that we all love you so very, very much. You are in good hands and you will never be alone here." I told her again that I loved her.

Not long after, I heard the sound of children in the hallway, I popped my head around the door and Jessica and Daniel came walking in along with Dan. I was so pleased to see them, our family united once again, during this tragic time in our lives. Jessica was carrying a plastic bag with her. She came in and placed the bag on Elianna's bed. I asked her what was in the bag and she said in a bright childlike voice, "Barbies! Maybe when Sis gets better we can play with our Barbie dolls." I turned to Jessica and said, "What a nice thought Jess, I'm sure Sis would love that." Jessica always used to call her respected older sister "Sis." Little did Jessica know the dire circumstances of Elianna's condition and how life threatening the situation was. I felt a sudden sadness at that moment for Jessica and Daniel and hugged them both tightly.

As we were all quietly talking, the neurologist stood at the door and asked to speak to Dan and me. He took both of us aside to discuss Elianna's condition. The neurologist and his team found that Elianna had suffered from an AVM, arteriovenous

malformation. This means that the blood vessels in one part of her brain are abnormal, therefore can leak or rupture at any time leading to damaged brain cells. The rupture caused a lot of blood to leak in her brain. This malformation was something she was born with apparently and it started during fetal development. Elianna suffered a rupture on the right side of her brain, which explains why she complained her left side felt numb. The right side of the brain controls the left side of the body and the left side of the brain controls the right side of the body. Dan and I were at a loss for words, we were speechless. The neurologist explained to us that Elianna is in a very grave condition and has blood clots in her brain. They were running out of options. The pressure in her brain could result in a crushed brain stem if they didn't act quickly. The team of neurologists tried several different approaches but none of them seemed to work. However, there was one last option which needed our approval which was administering medication into her vein, through the IV so they could treat the swelling of the brain tissue which would in turn speed up the drainage of cerebral spinal fluid.

Dan and I told the doctors to do what they had to so they went ahead to proceed with the final treatment. We just wanted Elianna to get better and to bring her home.

It was hard for us to understand why this came about. She was healthy, happy, smart, lived her life to the full and never had headaches in fact if she did

have a serious of headaches we would have taken her to the doctor. She lived her 12 years but not one of us knew she had this; so very difficult to comprehend.

Dan and I broke the news to my mom and Chris. They too were astounded and confused as to why Elianna had this.

In the early afternoon, Chris decided to leave and go home so she could send out an E-mail to the school to let everyone know what was going on. I had heard that there were so many people sending prayers our way since the news broke.

By the second day most of our community knew about Elianna being in hospital. So many people were very concerned and anxious. It was nice to know that everyone was concerned and that we weren't so alone and all the prayers sent our way were signs of comfort to us as a family.

During Elianna's stay in hospital we had a couple of the staff from the school visit her. I was happy they came by to show their support to us. They too were shocked seeing Elianna this way since both staff members had known her for seven years. Looking back it was probably very upsetting for them also and they too found this difficult to comprehend.

While the doctors were performing the procedure, the clinical psychologist stopped by the room so she could take Jessica and Daniel to her room. Her job

was to explain to both Daniel and Jessica the reason why Elianna is sick and to answer any questions they may have or what may be bothering them. In conjunction with this, she would use a technique called art therapy which is helpful for children who have witnessed any kind of trauma.

During the following two hours the procedure started working a little. I noticed that the cerebral fluid seemed to be draining out a little quicker through the EVD tube which was inserted in her head, however this finally slowed down during the course of the day. The doctors and critical care nurses tried to stay positive but the hours seem to suddenly appear a little darker as time went on. Deep in my mind, there was still a very tiny glimmer of hope though which we desperately clung on to.

Towards the evening Dan left with the kids and my mom and I stayed at the hospital, comforting Elianna, stroking her head and talking with the critical care nurses. The critical care nurses were amazing. They had a lot of compassion and empathy for us and kept us updated as to what was going on, on a constant basis. The chaplain showed her support towards our family and she was a tremendous source of comfort to me as she would often come by throughout the day to check and see how Elianna was doing and how we were during those long, dark and lonely hours.

Mom and I sat by Elianna and talked about her. We tried to make light of the situation the best we could

but it was extremely difficult. I cried a little as I went over to touch her arm. I wiped the tears from my face, leaned over and whispered, "Elianna, we all love you so very much and everyone is praying for you, you will be ok I promise, just hang in there. You are very strong and God is watching over you. Grandma came over today on a plane and both her and I are here for you so you don't need to worry. You are not alone, we are right here by your side." I remember feeling somber and thinking, *I wish she would wake up*. I missed talking with her. I felt completely devastated.

The nurses had wrapped Elianna in a couple of warm blankets because her body started to cool off slightly due to the functioning of the brain. The nurses tucked the blankets in neatly by her sides and they were very gentle and caring towards her. They treated her with the absolute respect and dignity she deserved.

As the hours went by my mom fell asleep. She was mentally exhausted and so was I especially not being able to sleep for two days but somehow I felt the spiritual powers around me giving me the strength I needed. I sat in the chair thinking and praying in my mind hoping Elianna would get better, pleading with God to help her. My stomach was in knots and I had not eaten a thing during the past couple of days. Food was far from my mind during this sorrowful time. As I tried to get comfortable I could still faintly hear the whispering sounds of the nurse's voices and doctors who were periodically

checking in and monitoring her. I began to close my eyes but never actually going to sleep. I was just in a dozing state. I would wake up consistently, afraid that I would miss something.

During the night I would often sit by Elianna as she lay in the hospital bed, and just talk to her. I remember I would talk to her about the past.

I whispered into her ear, "Remember the time when I used to lay with you in bed at night and we would talk about your day at school?" Or I would remind her of the funny things, "Do you remember making me laugh when you mimicked different accents? You were so funny Elianna, and made me laugh!"

Even though I was reminding my daughter of all these special times, my heart was broken and I was devastated, not knowing if she would ever make it, I never gave up hope, though, and would also whisper to her, "Do you remember the time, Elianna, when we were watching the movie *Home Alone* and you couldn't stop laughing? I remember looking over at you, thinking how your lovely laugh just brightened the room! Oh and the time when we watched the movie *ET*, do you remember Elianna? You, Daniel, Jessica and I cried our eyes out." Even as I reminded my dear daughter of all this, I was still shedding tears of sadness. However, in the depths of my despair I still managed to smile at all these very special memories, memories which can never be taken away and memories which my family and I can cherish forever.

Sometime later I had many thoughts here and there which began to race through my mind. I remember thinking back to when Elianna was a baby. I had taken her to England on several occasions and also to Germany to visit my sister. I remember suddenly thinking to myself *oh my goodness, Elianna could have collapsed while we were overseas or even worse this tragedy could have happened on the flight crossing the Atlantic Ocean.* What would we have done then? The hemorrhage could have happened when we went to Florida, or even at a friend's house, even Girl Scout camp or even during the night and then she would have never woken up. We would never have those special moments with her before she collapsed.

I shook my head suddenly and got up out of my chair trying to focus on other things because the thoughts were starting to overwhelm me. I decided to walk outside to get some fresh air. I didn't like leaving Elianna alone but I felt like the stress was getting to me.

Wednesday 10th August Dan, the kids and Chris had arrived. The prognosis did not look good. Waiting around was so very difficult because there didn't seem to be an end to it all. The nurses and doctors did all they could but there was no change in her condition. We were just waiting around endlessly not knowing what the outcome would be. I started feeling down. We tried to keep ourselves busy waiting for some miracle to happen.

Later that afternoon, around 4pm, Dan and I were discussing Chris driving my mom, kids and I home and that Dan would stay the night with Elianna so that my mom and I could try to get a good night's rest. I was hesitant about leaving Elianna but I finally agreed because I also knew my mom needed the rest as she began to look weary. I could have easily stayed but I had to think about my mom.

I went by Elianna and whispered to her in her ear, "Elianna, Grandma and I are going home soon so we can get some rest. Dad will be staying with you. You are in good hands. He will take care of you. He will be right here by your side." I then told her I loved her, gently squeezed her hand and kissed her on her cheek. I was hoping so much she could hear me.

Several minutes later, the numbers on her ICP monitor (Intracranial pressure monitor) suddenly started to climb. I started to panic within. The critical care nurse rushed in and began to check her vital signs. The neurologist also rushed in. Everything was happening so very fast and we knew it wasn't good. We were all in dismay. Before we knew it there were doctors and nurses crowding round and wheeling Elianna quickly out of the room. The nurse told us that they had to take her to get a CT scan. A CT scan determines how much swelling has occurred in Elianna's brain. I bowed my head in my hands and prayed silently, *Oh God, please help Elianna.* I repeated this several times to myself. I so desperately wanted my daughter to

wake up and be well again. None of us knew what was going on as we glanced at one another in confusion. It wasn't too much longer before they wheeled Elianna back into the room. I just felt so hopeless and so sad.

They started to hook the monitors up. I then asked the neurologist what the outcome was. He then told us the dreaded news no parent wants to hear. He told us because of the pressure in the brain they thought Elianna had a stroke. I felt disoriented and bewildered. Dan approached one of the neurologists and asked in a quiet, yet sad tone, "What is going on?" There was a long pause before Dan was able to ask, "Is she gone or is she going make it?" The neurologist looked at us with a very serious expression. It was so hard for him to get the words out so he just shook his head and said, "I'm afraid not." I gasped and covered my face with both hands. I just stood there as Dan tried to comfort me by putting his arm around me. I don't even remember what I said to him at that moment but I know I turned to him and said something. Dan was just as confused and numb as I was. The tiniest ray of hope I had clung on to during these desperate and lonely hours had disappeared. There was no light to be seen and everything started to become dark and heavy.

The Chaplain came to see us immediately and to give us comfort. Nobody would ever imagine this happening. I mean Elianna is just a child, how can this happen to a child. I don't think I cried at that

moment because I was in such a state of shock and this was not the kind of news any of us wanted to hear. Both Daniel and Jessica were sat on the bed staring at us. How can children digest this kind of tragic news? Elianna was happily playing with Jessica two days ago and now I have to tell them both that their sister is no longer here. *I don't believe this, I don't believe this*, I kept saying in my head. *My daughter has gone. What do I tell the kids?* Dan and I had to sit down to talk to them and to tell them the hardest thing imaginable. I just couldn't bear telling them.

As all these thoughts were rushing through my head it was then when I felt a sudden surge of energy rush through my body. This energy was peaceful and comforting and it felt warm. I felt this energy come in through the top of my head and transcend downwards throughout my body. Something I have never, ever experienced before in my life. I truly believe this energy came from Elianna or from some spiritual source. This was an amazing feeling and I believe this energy gave me the absolute strength to tell Daniel and Jessica that Elianna wasn't with us anymore and had gone to heaven. It was still difficult for us to tell them but somehow this spiritual strength made it easier. We all cried and we hugged the kids very tightly. I told them Elianna has gone to a special place full of peace and love and that she will be around us still watching over all of us. Even though the words came out so easy, I still felt heaviness in my heart knowing that we wouldn't be bringing our sweet angel home with us ever again.

So many thoughts and emotions were conjuring up inside of me. My mom just sat there with a blank look on her face trying to make sense of it in fact all of us were trying to make sense of this sudden loss. Everything seemed to be happening so very, very fast. My poor mom came for a holiday and ended up witnessing her granddaughter passing away. Even though we knew she was gone, these words were not truly cemented in our minds just yet. There are no words to describe this. How can any of us make light as to what just happened. It was horrendous and unfathomable.

It was getting late and Chris had to leave. Chris was the link to many of our friends and the parents of the children at the school and she had to let everyone know the devastating news. I walked her to the entrance of the ICU and hugged and thanked her for her support then all of a sudden we both broke down and cried as we embraced with a long hug. We really didn't know what to say besides cry. None of us were able to make any sense of this tragedy.

That evening, I knew I had to call my sister, Mandy to tell her the dreaded news. I went into one of the waiting rooms and dialed her number. She answered rather quickly, intuitively knowing it was me. As soon as she answered I burst out crying telling her Elianna didn't make it. "Oh Mandy, Mandy, we've lost her" At the time Mandy couldn't speak. There was a horrible short silence on the phone. She told

me her good friend Manfred was there also, thank goodness, and he was extremely shocked and held his head in his hands for a long time saying, "oh no, oh no" Mandy told me that Manfred just could not accept that our laughing red haired girl had gone.

Mandy of course was in shock and in total disbelief and then she too started saying, "oh no, oh no." She told me she was holding Manfred's hand for comfort. It was so unreal, so terrible.

I tried to explain as much as I possibly could over the phone to my sister but it was too traumatic for all concerned. We all had to digest the terrible news as best we could.

It is sometimes difficult when family live far away. You want them to be with you in times like these but you just have to adjust. My sister's first and obvious reaction was that she wanted to come over, to comfort me and get some kind of closure. After all my sister Mandy had been over to visit us, the year before on her 52nd birthday, and she told me how much fun she had with Elianna and how nicely Elianna decorated her birthday cake so carefully with lots of M&M's.

It was a real tragedy-not only for my family and me but also for my sister and her German friends who were pretty upset for months to come. So far away, yet thankfully we were all connected by E-mail and telephone which was reassuring.

I did explain to Mandy that it would probably be better to fly over after the funeral, once everything had calmed down a little and everyone had adjusted slowly to the bad situation, but does one ever really adjust? I know from myself that I was the one who had to adjust the most and thanks to my newfound amazing inner strength I managed to do this, for the sake also of my grieving family.

Dan made a couple of phone calls to tell his own family who were desperately sat around waiting for the news of Elianna. It was hard for Dan's family to accept that she had just actually passed away. She had only visited them the week before and had so much fun, laughing, swimming, fishing!! It was so unbelievable. Nobody could make head or tail of this very tragic news. They were also just as shocked as anybody. Still to this very day I don't know what kind of words were spoken over the phone and how his family reacted, I just knew all of us were sadly in a state of shock and dismay.

Dan came over by me after he had made a couple of calls and placed his hand on my arm and said in a very quiet and sad voice "one of the donor coordinators is here from Madison and they would like to know if we would be interested giving the gift of life to help other people by donating Elianna's organs. If not, Elianna would have to be taken off the life support equipment this evening." I thought for a moment and then took a deep breath and said, "Ok, let's do it." I could not believe my response looking back. Everything started to happen so very

fast. We must have been part in shock because at that moment we were not able to absorb the reality of her death as it was too sudden. I know Elianna was very healthy otherwise and I felt that part of her would live on in other people; at least her 12 years of life were not in vain.

My mom wanted to stay in the room with Elianna. The psychologist took both Daniel and Jessica to her room to talk to them. In the meantime, Dan and I went with the donor coordinator to fill out paperwork and to give our consent to the organ donation.

I believe so much spiritual strength was around us during this sorrowful time. I remember feeling dazed and bewildered as the donor coordinator talked to us about the process of donation. I remember thinking we had just lost our daughter a couple hours ago and now we are giving our consent to donate her organs. How a tragedy can turn one's life around so very suddenly. Then again I do believe shock had already set in but looking back this was a wonderful thing to do on our part and of course we don't regret it to this day. I was amazed at how we were able to function. We donated Elianna's heart, lungs, kidneys, liver and pancreas. We also donated the corneas from Elianna's eyes, the skin off her back to be used for skin grafts and her legs and all the little bones in her feet. Elianna's tendons, knee joints, nerves, hamstrings, quadriceps and all other ligaments went to grateful recipients.

The process was pretty long but the donor coordinator tried to make it as least difficult as possible. Elianna was to stay on the machines until tomorrow, Aug 11th and then the surgeons would remove her organs. Dan, my mom, the kids and I decided to stay in the room on that Wednesday evening with Elianna one last time.

That evening we made hand prints from Elianna's hands. These molds would be something we will treasure forever. Our lives would never be the same without her; from this day forward the Boyd Family had to find a new normal.

A poem my sister wrote to me

The angels asked Jesus,
"Are you sure it's alright
If we take Elianna
Before the morning light?
We would not want her mother to grieve
It just wouldn't be right
To forsake her in the darkest night!
To touch Elianna with our wings
And lift her gently out of her hospital bed and then
leave the mother with a heavy heart
And troubled head."
Jesus replied to the Angels,
"Did you ever think I would take
Back one of my flock
And leave a mother to grieve desolate, disbelieving
and broken-hearted
That her best girl has now departed?
How could I abandon her?
In her loss?
For I am the resurrection and life
I gave my life on the cross
And those who believe in me
Will never die - Just like Elianna
Their souls will reside in eternal peace
From a place far away
from the earth beneath.
I will give the mother courage
And I will give her strength
So that she may climb the highest fence
And she will find faith

In her heart that still weeps
For her best girl
While the rest of the world sleeps
And if this mother feels weary
And her heart is as heavy as a stone
I promise I will soothe her
In dreams I will embrace her
I will turn to face her
And hold her close
And whisper words
That comforts her the most.
And though this mother's tears will flow
Her garden will grow
For those tears moisten the earth
Suddenly all flowers of
Nature will bloom
Filling each corner of the room
With their sweet perfume
Their fragrance will lift her aching heart
And her best girl will not be so far apart
In time the mother will realize
These are healing tears
A passage of those 12 precious years...
And the black hole in this mother's soul
Will once again be filled with light
That penetrates the darkest night
Like the golden rays of the sun
That will warm her
And comfort her
And heal from within
One day she may again dance and sing."
"Thank you, Jesus." The angels said,

Hovering, hesitating over the hospital bed,
"There are things we do not yet understand
As you hold the world
In the palm of your hand
Yet we believe in your mercy
We believe in your grace.
Let us transport Elianna
To that heavenly place."

Nobody saw the angels descend
But the angels felt calm towards the end
They looked back once at the little bed
Red hair fanned around the child's head
They knew before the morning light
That the angels had already taken flight
A red-haired angel is a beautiful sight.

Written by Amanda Jane Penny

Chapter 4

A New Normal

*Every moment and every event of every man's life on earth
plants something in his soul*

-

Thomas Merton

On the morning of Thursday Aug 11th we left the hospital, dazed and shocked as we grabbed our belongings. The hospital had given us beautiful prayer shawls which were knitted by hospital volunteers as well as albums for the children that had Elianna's hand print on the front of both albums. We thanked all the hospital staff for their efforts and their kindness trying to save our daughter but it was not meant to be. In one sense I found it difficult having to leave Elianna in her hospital bed, then again she really wasn't in there, she was just a shell, her spirit and soul had been set free.

Later on in the afternoon many friends and family had heard we were home so later on towards the late afternoon/early evening, many of them came over to express their condolences and to bring us food. This was hard for everybody because losing a child is not how it should be. A parent is meant to not outlive their child, not the other way around, so it was extremely difficult to comprehend for many

of us. We were hugging each other and sobbing, it was wonderful to have the support.

Friday August 12th, I woke up early around 6am. Today was the day we would meet with the funeral director. I could not stop thinking about Elianna. It was so very traumatic. I felt emptiness in my soul, trying to make sense of everything and the desperate feeling of wanting our little girl back with us. I felt a huge void within, a dark empty void. Trying to come to terms with what had happened was something I could not figure out. How a person's life can change so very quickly in a blink of an eye.

Feeling this heaviness within, I decided to go outside to get some fresh air and to let the dogs out. I went to sit down on the deck, talking to Elianna and crying. I looked at the trees which were gently swaying in the breeze, and said, while I sat there sobbing, "Elianna I love you so much, I am so sorry this happened." I put my face in my hands and yelled, "Why oh why?" I just wanted her to call out to me and say, "Mom I'm ok." I said, "Please Elianna, give me a sign to let me know you are ok." I continued to cry. "Why oh why did she have to leave us?" I could feel the salty tears streaming down my face as I stood up glancing at everywhere around me hoping I would suddenly see her. After spending some time outside and letting out my emotions, I went back in to the house.

I hadn't done laundry in 5 days and needed clothes to wear. I really didn't feel like doing laundry, I

mean this was the last thing on my mind and I just wanted to go back to bed, stay there all day and cry my heart out, but laundry needed to be done. As I solemnly walked downstairs into the basement something on the carpet caught my eye. I looked back and noticed a little frog on the carpet. I gasped and stood there for a minute. I could not believe what I saw! "Elianna, oh Elianna is this you?" I asked in a stunned voice. "Elianna, either this is you or you sent the frog to me." Wow that was so quick and so unbelievable. I started to cry again. My eyes were raw with all the tears I had cried. I have never seen a frog in the basement ever and I know that Elianna knew I needed this little frog to tell me "hi" from her. I knew deep within it was her. I managed to smile though, bent down and picked up this little frog and cooped him in the palm of my hand. I was completely stunned. I looked at the frog and stroked him. I had just asked Elianna for a sign and she brought this frog to me. I started to cry even more as the tears were falling down my cheeks. I guess she was listening to me and she knows my pain. I then went outside, and looked to the sky and said, "Thank you Elianna, thank you for this beautiful sign. I know it's from you, I just know. So you are letting me know you are ok? Thank you. I will let everyone know." I knelt on the grass and let the little frog hop out of my hand and into a bush. I sat there for a minute in awe. Thinking back, Elianna used to love picking up frogs when she was a little girl so the sign made sense to me. I knew it was her. It was a very bittersweet pain I felt on that day.

While making coffee the next morning, I remember feeling very weary, plus I had not eaten much during the last four days apart from a few crackers and a little fruit. When you are stressed with worry and see your daughter in such grave condition, and then find out she is no longer here, well, food is not important. The stress, worry and uncertainty take over.

Not long after, I made coffee, I heard my mom walking down the stairs. She came and stood by me. I glanced over at her and said, "I just can't make sense of all this Mom! It's too difficult for me to get my head around." I just started to cry.

"I know love," she said, "it's hard for all of us to make sense of any of this." She put her arm around my shoulders and then in a quiet and gentle voice she said Louise, "I saw Elianna's shadow early this morning." I looked at my mom, still crying and said, "You did?" I then asked her to explain what she saw. I have always been open-minded and before she even started to speak I instantly believed her. I asked her again to explain what she saw in detail. *Oh my goodness*, I remember thinking, *she is around us*.

The night before, my mom had decided to sleep in Elianna's room, because she wanted to feel close to her. She had not seen her for a year, but she did speak to Elianna a week before she came to see us. The last conversation she had with my mom was very special to her and she still remembers the phone conversation to this very day. Elianna was

very excited about a fish she caught when we went fishing this particular time and told my mom all about it.

My mom continued to talk about her amazing experience. It was around 3:00 a.m. when my mom woke up. She then noticed a very bright light coming through the window, and suddenly, in front of her she saw a shadow of a person, it could only have been Elianna's shadow. Her shadow came over by the bed and then my mom felt a gentle movement over her legs and felt a slight breeze at the same time. I believe Elianna was trying to climb into bed on the side she always used to sleep on. My mom wasn't afraid at all. She told me after she felt her gently climb over her, she patted Elianna's side of the bed to let Elianna know she knew it was her spirit. I believe we both knew that it was Elianna.

The wake was August 15th, 2011. Dan's family came the afternoon prior. It was incomprehensible for them because Elianna used to spend many vacations in Northern Wisconsin while growing up. There were so many memories to share and now this little girl is no longer with us. The week before Elianna fell unconscious, Dan took Daniel, Jessica and Elianna to see his family and they had a special time. Looking back I was happy that they were able to spend time with their grandma, their aunt and uncle and cousin, especially now knowing the unforeseen circumstances.

The strength that Dan and I had endured during the wake and the funeral was amazing. The community reached out to us with such kind and loving heartfelt words. Everyone came together during this difficult, sorrowful time. I felt their energy lift us as a family and we felt so very comforted. We had continuous support during the next couple of weeks. Many friends were there for us in many ways. A family loaned us outfits to wear for the funeral, another family cleaned our house, another good friend helped set up pictures for the wake and funeral. Many of our friends and family contributed towards the food for the funeral. Another friend went shopping for school supplies for both Daniel and Jessica. So many people wanted to help in any way they could.

I could not believe how many people came to honor Elianna both at the wake and the funeral. During the wake, we stood in line greeting friends and family for three hours. I prayed beforehand asking God and his angels to protect us, keep us strong and to send us comforting vibes. We witnessed many emotions from everybody. Nobody really knows what to say in a situation like this however, during the visitation I felt myself comforting other people. Funny, but I felt then and there the value of my own spiritual strength and the comforting thought of knowing my prayer had been answered.

The week after the funeral, my mom returned to England. We had experienced so much together during the month she was over. It was very hard for

her to leave. She helped me as much as she could, physically and emotionally but the time had come for her to return home.

Normally every year it is difficult for me to say goodbye to my mom, but this time it was even more difficult. I had experienced one of life's harshest blows and I felt I needed my mother, to be here with me for support. My mom being there with me in the hospital, trying to comfort me in her own way, who felt my pain, watching as I held Elianna's hands, speaking words of comfort and praying with her during the darkest hours.

Even though Dan and the kids were with us I still felt the pain in my heart and the fact we had to say goodbye during such a terribly mournful time. I told her to keep strong and to call me as soon as she arrived home safely. As we all waved goodbye to her at the gate I felt such loneliness, emptiness within. She looked back and smiled at us one last time and then disappeared out of view. I took a deep breath and then my eyes began welling up with tears. I wanted to keep strong because I didn't want the kids to see me cry. It was so terribly difficult, trying to stay strong on the outside, yet feeling such pain on the inside.

Chapter 5

What a Beautiful Sound!

*There are no goodbyes for us. Wherever you are, you will
always be in my heart.*

-
Ghandi

The following Sunday morning, Dan made breakfast for us all. When Elianna was here he always made a special breakfast. Elianna always loved his pancakes so he decided to continue making her favorite breakfast food. Of course this took a lot of strength for Dan. It was extremely difficult for us all trying to get thru the hours of the day without Elianna but somehow and from somewhere I felt the strength to continue. On that morning I was walking around trying to make some sense out of my grief – stricken self, it all seemed like one long nightmare.

All these mixed emotions and feelings were starting to surface especially the stage of *shock*. I remember distinctly telling Dan that I had never felt so numb. I was walking around like a zombie and I kept thinking *I can't believe Elianna isn't here. I can't believe it.* I remember going upstairs to her bedroom and sitting there in a daze of numbness and grief. I started looking through her school work and also looking at her Barbie dolls she loved playing with. I then held her favorite purple sweatshirt close to my chest; I said in such a heartbroken voice, "Oh Elianna, I wish you were here! We miss you. Why

did you have to leave us so soon?" I could feel my emotions turn to anger and shouted out, "Why, why, why did you have to leave us? I don't understand it!" The room felt very silent and I sensed emptiness. I wanted her back, the pain was so strong and I felt that my heart was broken into little tiny pieces.

After several minutes my voice then started to soften and through my tears I said, "I wish you were here with us, I feel so very sad and lonely without you." My heart ached desperately for her. It felt so very, very painful. All these mixed emotions running through me. I cannot begin to describe how grief stricken I had become.

Sometime later, Dan came upstairs and placed his hand on my shoulder to tell me breakfast was ready. I told him about how numb I had been feeling and asked how in the world we were going to get through this. Of course he felt the same way as I felt and he wasn't able to say much at all. What truly is there to say when both parents have lost a child? He did tell me that we both have Daniel and Jessica to keep us going. Saying these few words to me must have given him tremendous strength and courage. As I look back, I know he was trying to help me in his own special way, while also dealing with his own pain and sadness of losing his daughter.

After breakfast, Jessica decided to go to her room and lay down because her tummy hurt and Daniel

went into the living room to play with his army figures. Dan and I were still sat at the table in a devastated silence when all of a sudden we heard the sound of a trumpet playing. In life Elianna always liked to play the trumpet. We both immediately looked at one another in absolute astonishment. Our mouths literally dropped open. I then whispered to Dan, "it's Elianna, it's Elianna!" I then put my hand to my mouth in disbelief. "Oh my word, it's her, it's her." It sounded so far away yet so near. We heard the trumpet very clearly as if she was practicing in her room. She wasn't playing a particular song but just practicing some notes. I hurriedly got up from the table and went to ask Daniel if he could hear anything. I said, "Daniel can you hear the sound of a trumpet?" He listened and told me he could not hear anything. Actually, I was unable to hear the sound of the trumpet in the living room, but as soon as I came back into the kitchen I could hear her play just for a few seconds more, but then the sound stopped. I then rushed upstairs to Jessica's room to ask her if she had heard anything. I said "Jessica, did you hear a trumpet?" She said she'd heard nothing, and then quickly placed the comforter over her head.

I didn't mean to scare her, and I understand that being only seven she was unable to process the fact that her sister was in heaven, yet she was back here playing the trumpet! In fact, even for adults this is difficult to comprehend. Yet it was very real indeed. This sign was able to lift my heavy heart just a little. I strongly believe today that this was a sign from our

dear daughter, a musical sign that was really meant only for her parents, Dan and I. She could no longer talk to us however, just playing a few notes gave us the reassurance that she is still around us in spirit.

It was small but so vital. Signs like these give us hope and comfort to let us know that there is life after death.

Chapter 6

Adjusting to Life without Elianna

Grief is the price we pay for love.

-
Queen Elizabeth II

Adjusting to life without our precious daughter is a day to day struggle however, in such a short time the signs I have so far experienced have started to give me inner strength. I am able to cope and pull my family together surely but slowly. The strength is filtering through me onto my family. The strength I carry is handled with wisdom, empathy and grace.

A tree ceremony was dedicated to Elianna at the school in September 2011. Our close friends and the classmates of Elianna were asked to join us. It was very memorable. Some of the girls from her class played their instruments while others read. It was a beautiful day and I must say that I did experience energy, Elianna's energy. The tree is a wonderful idea which signifies that in life there may be life changing situations but there is never an end to life, it is just a continuous cycle just like a tree that continues to bear fruit or blossom each year.

Daniel and Jessica started back at school in the September and I started back full time at college. At this point in time I had I wanted to enroll in full time school because school would shift my focus from constantly thinking and weeping about my

daughter since the pain would be too unbearable for me. I read about the stages of grief and I was afraid of what to expect since the journey is long and the idea of feeling the pain was not something I wanted to feel. All these relentless thoughts and emotions pouring out of me was something I didn't deep down want to feel. However, there is no avoiding this. We have to experience grief by crying and feeling the pain in order to heal.

The school counselor was able to make arrangements for the grief counselor to come to the school on a weekly basis to help with the grief group. Besides Daniel and Jessica, there were other students who had sadly lost their fathers in the previous couple of years so arranging some type of grief- counseling was well needed.

Then, one day much later on, one of our good friends who is a teacher at my children's school, brought in diaries for Daniel and Jessica so she could write to them and they could write back expressing their feelings. My husband, Dan and I thought this was a wonderful idea and would certainly help them come to terms with their feelings and express their profound grief.

We tried to carry on as best we could. Every time I would walk into Daniel and Jessica's school my heart would sink. In my mind's eye, I would vision Elianna. I would see her walking down the hallway, playing in the gym, or eating in the cafeteria; places where she once used to be. Walking into Jessica and

Daniel's classrooms was a heart wrenching experience because I would vision Elianna sitting at her desk knowing that she once was present in this particular room. Prior to a "meet and greet" special arrangements were made for me to stop by the school to bring in the kids school supplies, as I could not face being with a large crowd. It was too difficult. As I walked into his classroom I distinctly remember where Elianna used to sit. It was so hard that I even shed a few tears in front of the teacher.

I know the teachers were very sad too but we had to carry on the best we could. Even the playground would make me so terribly sad. The swings she used to swing on, the slide she used to slide down and the school fields where she used to practice soccer. Seeing all this broke my heart. To think I would never see her again playing and laughing and just being a child. Later on I would go by and talk to some of the teachers and tell them my experiences I had from Elianna. They were excited to hear of my experiences which brought them great comfort and made them smile and the fact of knowing that part of her is still around.

One of the most difficult experiences was seeing her classmates together at school, especially the girls. This was so painful for me, and there were times in the beginning I had to look away. Once in a while when I had the strength to look I would vision dear Elianna within the group wondering who she would be talking to and how would she be acting. How I miss seeing her striking red hair and kind smile.

These experiences were deeply sad. Oh, how I wish I could have her back and for us all to carry on as a normal family again.

Sometimes when we are so consumed in our grief we are unaware of other people's grief and we don't notice as much. I did not yet recognize that Elianna's friends had lost one of their valuable classmates, nor did I notice any of the teachers grieving because they lost a talented student, nor both grandmas losing their granddaughter, Dan losing his first born daughter, and Jessica and Daniel both losing their big sister.

I may have lost a dear daughter, but in time I realized that Elianna's school friends had also lost something special and irreplaceable - they had lost their classmate and were very grief-stricken. Unfortunately, I have no idea to this day how they coped with their grief having lost a classmate. I wish I did know but I guess young girls and boys have their own way of internalizing and coming to terms with their own particular grief. Sadly though, since losing Elianna, the contact with the other girls did seem to taper off – I had to move on. Sad as it was, they had to carry on with their lives also, make new friends, and sometimes I even felt a little “left behind” in some weird way. Today, I still have some contact with a couple of Elianna's former classmates and I know these girls will always miss their special friend, but things have changed and I have had to accept this and move on. Thanks to my spiritual

strength, I was able to understand and accept all of this.

During this time it became difficult for me to look at the photo albums of Elianna, looking at the pictures of her with her friends and siblings smiling and having fun. I didn't want to look at the happy pictures of Elianna because it hurt me too much since I knew she was no longer around. It wasn't the time to go through the photo albums and reminisce since I was beginning the most difficult period of my journey where a mother would feel the sadness, guilt, loneliness and depression. I didn't want to be reminded of someone who was no longer physically around because it hurt me terribly so.

In October, 2011, I was checking the mail. As I was going through the mail I noticed a letter from the Blood Center of Wisconsin. The letter was to inform us briefly about the recipients of Elianna's organs. I took a deep breath and opened the letter and began to feel my heart beating loudly. As I unfolded the letter I started reading but then the words began to appear blurry as my eyes welled with tears and then I started to suddenly feel overwhelmed. The words were too heavy for me to even begin to grasp at that time. I walked up the driveway to Dan and just broke down. I have never cried so much at once. Dan had to hold me up. I cried inconsolably until I could not cry anymore. I know at that point Elianna's death hit me. There had been a buildup of all these raw emotions and

feelings and the emotions were stirring within and I had to break down and cry and just let go. Dan briefly glanced at the letter but it was so very difficult for him also. He felt his need to console me. We just stood there embracing one another for a long time as we were both experiencing the same pain. There were no words spoken, just tears and the most overwhelming feeling of sadness and pain you would never ever believe.

Weeks later I mustered up enough courage and bravely read the letter to myself while I was alone. The letter was extremely heart wrenching, but sooner or later I knew it was important for me to read. Many recipients had benefitted from Elianna's organs and apparently, all were doing well which was a wonderful thing. I remember saying out loud that's great the recipients are doing well but this doesn't bring my daughter back!" I remember throwing the letter down and started to cry endlessly. I needed to cry because crying is the only way we heal. I desperately longed to have my daughter back but knew it wasn't meant to be. Once again, reading the letter, I knew Elianna's death had hit me.

I decided to go outside to get some fresh air, the sound of a helicopter flew over the house, I looked up and noticed that it was flight for life. I suddenly felt this heavy wave of sadness engulf me as I stood there staring at the sky. *Oh Elianna*, I said, *I miss you so much*. I continued staring at the helicopter until it began to fade in to the distance.

We tried to make the best of each day. The strength I received started to carry me further along which I know now filtered through Dan and the kids. We tried to make the most of it, yet still hurting deep within.

The school had their annual Halloween party, October 2011. The kids seemed to have fun. It was difficult seeing all the children parade around in their costumes which brought memories back of our own daughter and how she loved dressing up also. There was no doubt in my mind that she was there in spirit. Her life pretty much revolved around the school while she was here and I know deep within my soul that a little of her energy still lives on at the school to this day.

As the days passed by, I noticed that many people became a little guarded. They really didn't know what to say. I would walk past them with a half-smile depending on my day. Grief is like a rollercoaster. Some days we feel up and other days we feel down. I would not want go out of the house because of feeling too sad whereas other days I would be ok and would have the strength to go out. I didn't want to look too upset and so many times I would bravely put a smile on my face so my friends, the parents and teachers at the school wouldn't feel uncomfortable so that I would be approachable to them. Many parents would say "hi, how are you?" with a big smile on their face, maybe this was a cover up for them too.

After days and weeks passed by, I became slightly annoyed with people who approached me with a big smile. Wouldn't it be nice if they stopped me and asked me in a concerned way how I was actually doing? I wanted people to talk to me and to talk about my daughter. Why is grief so taboo? Why should we sweep grief under the carpet? At some point in our lives we all experience death. Although the death of a child is so unfathomable that I believe people just don't know how to react.

I would also have people asking me to call them if I needed anything and I know they truly meant it but shouldn't this be the other way around? Shouldn't they be calling me? I am the one who is grieving having lost a child. It's hard enough waking up to the pain every day never mind having to burden my mind furthermore wondering who I can call to help me with this and that or even to take the kids for a few hours.

Dan's friends had been wonderful to him during the process of his grief. He has several friends and they were overall very concerned for his well-being. They would listen to him if he needed someone to talk to and they would call him often. He tells me to this day that he couldn't ask for better friends. They are all very supportive with one another and more like family in our opinion. In fact he has always said that his friends are his family.

I will always remember the first dream I had of Elianna. It was in November of 2011. This dream was very real because I could sense it very strongly.

Normally, when we dream we dream in the astral plane so it's easier for our loved ones to reach us because we are in their world. The dream began where I found myself suddenly appearing in one of the spiritual dimensions on the other side. I was standing there with this beautiful light around me. There wasn't a sky and there wasn't grass just a light which felt so warm and comforting. As I stood there embracing this splendor of light I suddenly noticed Elianna about 10 feet away. She was wearing her favorite purple sweatshirt and her long, red, wavy hair was swept back off her face in a ponytail. Her cheeks were very rosy and her face showed some kind of curiosity as if she was looking for someone or something. I yelled out to her, "Elianna, Elianna," and waved my right hand trying to get her attention but to my dismay she did not see me and did not hear me. I remember someone or something telling me in my dream to call her name telepathically, in my mind. So I called her name in my mind and waved to her. She suddenly turned around; her radiant smile captured my heart as she glided towards me. We wrapped our arms around one another and embraced for about a second although in the dream it seemed longer. In the dream I remember the feeling of not wanting to let go of her and I just wanted to hold her forever but it was not meant to be. I then woke up.

I have had several dreams of Elianna but this is one beautifully and spiritually fulfilling dream I will never forget. These real experiences do comfort me very much but I still have to come to terms with the

grief my physical body is enduring during this sad and tragic time in my life.

As the weeks rolled on I continued to play the events back in my mind a couple of times a day relating back to that tragic day when she fell ill. *Was there something we could have done to save her?* I thought. *Maybe I should have called 911 earlier.*

I was slowly becoming angry and depressed. However, underneath all these emotions and feelings I had this underlying strength which I know was instilled in me the day Elianna passed. Thank goodness for this strength because I noticed the support started to dwindle. There were a couple of mourners at the funeral who I know quite well kindly offered to have Jessica over to play and to give me time to myself if needed but nothing materialized and it was already December. Parents need to be a little more attentive to the circumstances. I felt angry and most disappointed because there were so many meaningful words said at the funeral and many which hardly came to fruition later on. It seemed to me that many of these spoken words were just like empty vessels. Saying something is one thing but actually following through with this is another. Poor Jessica had just lost her big sister and I was terribly angry that these people didn't bother to reach out. I have been told many times after the funeral is over then people stop calling. On the bright side Jessica had other friends who we met up with. I sensed that she was

strong underneath to cope with the initial loss of her sister so I was grateful for that.

I am blessed to have my sister, Mandy, by my side who gave me hope and comfort during those dark days as we spoke about the soul and the spiritual wisdom growing within us. I learned so much from her at the time and we share this wonderful bond which is still ongoing today.

My mother helped me during the early days. We spent a couple hours on the phone, both expressing our grief and crying tears of sadness, as she was there and tried in her way to comfort me, in those long and sad hours at the beginning. My good friend Stacey would listen to me also and we would talk about what happened and the signs and energy I had so far experienced. I had to talk about Elianna, I just had to, and I could never forget her! In my heart and mind she still exists, even to this day!! I also had the opportunity to meet some of the parents from Daniel's class for coffee. We would talk of Elianna and I would share my spiritual experiences with them which would enlighten and inspire them and in turn would help me bear my heavy loss also. It was important to continue talking about Elianna and I appreciated them listening to me.

Chapter 7

A Difficult Christmas

Where there is anger, there is always pain underneath.

-
Eckhart Tolle

As Christmas day drew closer, I would receive Christmas cards here and there. As I read over them I saw there was no mention of Elianna. Elianna's death was still fresh in many people's minds I thought anyway, but after receiving 7-8 cards from a few people, I began to feel angry, lonely and sad. Many had written "Hope you have a good Christmas" or "wishing you a wonderful Christmas." I remember saying angrily to myself, *for heaven's sake! There is no mention of my daughter! How can you expect our family to have a good, wonderful, joyous Christmas when we had just lost our precious daughter? And on top of it, my dear daughter was not even recognized in the card, yet she existed for 12 years!*

It seemed like they were written from the heart yet looking back there wasn't a lot of deep thought or substance that had gone into any one of these cards. I felt very disappointed. I am sure that not too many people have lost children and so putting a little more thought into the "Boyd family" Christmas card would have been more meaningful to our family. How can these people show up at the funeral, show their utmost sadness, and write a meaningful condolence card, yet four months later –

and our very first Christmas without Elianna - they are unable to write a couple simple words in a Christmas card. Is it that difficult? What is so difficult about writing "thinking of you during this difficult time" or "Elianna will always be around you in spirit" or "Elianna will always live on in our hearts." A few words can mean so much to a grieving family at Christmas. I remember taking these cards and ripping them up into little pieces because it angered me so much at the time. I felt the feeling of loneliness and isolation and as if they were forgetting about her. It is very difficult to explain unless you have been through this.

Looking back I feel it is because many people are not comfortable with the notion of death and especially with the death of a child. Nobody knows what to do and nobody knows what to say. They probably felt awkward and did not know what to write or how to write it. So they just avoided the subject. Yet just asking how we were doing would have meant so much. I completely understand feeling uncomfortable by calling someone because most people don't have a clue what to say and it can be rather awkward. I do understand this greatly however, there are many ways to communicate today. Just sending a card and writing three simple words "thinking of you" could really have meant so much to our family. But, sadly, that first Christmas, this was not meant to be. People tended to shy away and possibly thought they might be intruding on our grief, yet if only they knew today how much we

would have appreciated those heartfelt 3 little words!!!

On a positive note, we did receive a few cards which were sent to us that had meaning and purpose. Dan and I still remember these particular Christmas cards to this day. The cards were written in such a caring way and made a difference to us during those sad, lonely moments we were experiencing. The blood center of Wisconsin also continually sent cards to us and little reminders to thank us for the gift of life we gave to them. Children's hospital has also been very supportive to us during those early days. These cards are sent as poignant reminders, reassuring us that people do care.

Christmas of 2011 was difficult for us but somehow, on the basis of our new-found strength, we managed to get through it. It was extremely difficult Christmas shopping, hearing the Christmas music in the stores. I wasn't in the mood considering we had just experienced one of life's harshest blows of losing our child which had turned our life upside down. Being joyful and festive was something I was unable to feel because my heavy heart would sink as I walked around the store. With a saddened voice I would say, "Oh, how I miss you Elianna" as I started to weep tears of sadness. Sometimes it would be unbearable for me so I would leave the store, tears streaming down my face with my head down so nobody would notice me crying. It was a truly devastating time, nothing could have been

worse. Instead of Christmas shopping with my dear daughter, I had to summon up strength to get through each day without her. She is no longer with us physically but I know somewhere in my heart that she is still here. We feel it every day, as her spirit will always live on. We will always remain Elianna's parents. Daniel will always be Elianna's brother and Jessica will always be Elianna's sister. Death makes no difference as Elianna will always be the big sister and role model for Jessica and Daniel. Even on Christmas we still set her place nicely at the table, with the food she loved, and poured out a drink for her in one of her favorite glasses. We still hang up her stocking, filled with German chocolate my sister would send over. This was her favorite. All of these reminders comforted us and it seemed like the right thing to do because Elianna was still part of the family.

We made plans that Christmas and invited close friends over while still trying to make the best of it for the sake of Daniel and Jessica. Underneath I still had this underlying sadness and so did Dan but I kept reminding him that Elianna is around us in spirit and she always will be and that she will forever live on in our hearts.

When Christmas day arrived and as the kids were hurriedly opening all their presents, Daniel looked up at me and said with a smile, "Mom, I forgot to tell you that Jess and I sneaked downstairs to look at the presents last night when you and Dad were sleeping." "Oh really," I said. He paused and said,

"Yes, and I could feel Elianna with me as I was sneaking downstairs." I felt a warm fuzzy feeling inside and smiled back. I remember thinking at the time for a ten-year-old little boy to feel his sister's spirit beside him is very special. I felt comforted by this. I leaned over and kissed both Daniel and Jessica on their heads and replied, "Your sister will always be with you, right?" They both nodded and continued opening their presents. I was surprised to hear later that Elianna, Daniel and Jessica always used to sneak downstairs while Dan and I were sleeping. Neither Dan nor I knew this. Something they will always remember, a special memory that Daniel and Jessica can cherish forever.

Christmas came and went and suddenly we were heading into 2012. The kids returned back to school and I signed up once again for college classes however, this time I was only taking the two classes instead of four. I realized it was important for me not to bombard myself with so many classes because it was essential that I slow down and make time to grieve. There is no point hiding my feelings and emotions to avoid the pain because then the pain can fester which can in turn appear later on in life. The only way we heal is by crying. God knows I have done a lot of this lately but I do know crying is the beginning road to grief. I am learning that if I feel like a good cry then I will cry. Many people think crying is a sign of weakness, they're wrong - crying is a sign of healing.

Chapter 8

Wake up and Smell the Coffee!

*Life is not separate from death
It only looks that way.*

-

Native American Nature Quotes.

During the first few months of 2012, I spent a lot of time reading books on spirituality. I wanted to know more about the afterlife. I felt a yearning for this desperately. I wanted to know where Elianna went. Did she see the bright light many people had often mentioned, how did she feel when her spirit and her soul left her body, who was there to greet her? I ended up checking out several books from the library. After a few months, I started to become so inspired and enlightened about the concept of life after death which in turn starting filling the lonely, dark and empty void within. I started reading every single day, absorbing all this insightful information. I could see the bigger picture and pieces here and there started coming together. I started to develop a great understanding about the spirit, the soul and the afterlife.

I have never been angry with God, ever. God brought Elianna here to us for a short while; she experienced our love, and then returned home again. He doesn't abandon any of us. Since Elianna passed away I have thanked him and his angels for helping us through the grief. He means no harm to

anybody and certainly doesn't give us any more than we can handle since we know of experiencing grief first hand. I don't see life as meaningless and I don't see this tragedy as horrible or terrible as some people might think. I have seen a lot of positive which has come from her passing. Sometimes we can turn life's tragedies around and bring good out of them, after all we are on this earth to live and learn and to influence others in our lives.

Since Elianna's passing I have been drinking more coffee than usual and so has Dan. We don't know why but our caffeine intake had definitely increased there for a while.

One night I woke up about 1 in the morning and started to smell coffee. This was strange since we were all in our beds, sleeping. I sat up for a minute, smelling the air, the smell was very strong. I didn't think too much about this so I went back to sleep. The following morning I woke up about 6am and yet again started smelling coffee. Why do I smell coffee? I thought. Dan was still sleeping and so were the kids. I thought that maybe he had woken up in the night and made a pot of coffee since he couldn't sleep. I got up and went downstairs to check. The coffee maker wasn't even on!! I remember thinking how very strange this was. I told Dan about it the following morning and then I started to think more and more. I remembered once reading at one time about loved ones in spirit who pass on try to get our attention in many different ways and one of them is through the sense of smell. This makes sense since I knew both Dan

and I had both been drinking a lot of coffee so it's maybe Elianna's way of saying "hi" and letting us know through the aromatic smell of coffee that she somehow is still around and knows what is going on!!

I started talking to Dan about this. He wasn't sure and he pretty much shunned my words at first. I had mentioned this on a couple of occasions and he just didn't want to believe me. I knew I wasn't going crazy since I sincerely believed that this was one of Elianna's ways to get our attention – and it worked!!

Then, a few nights later Dan told me that he could not sleep too well so he decided to go downstairs and lay on the couch. He said he fell asleep and then suddenly woke up to see Elianna at the picture window smiling at him. It was for a brief second he told me, but it was her and he was completely amazed at what he had seen! After some time he dozed off and this time he was awoken by the smell of coffee! He told me then he could hear the coffee maker gurgling. He said he remembered thinking to himself, *now why would Louise be making coffee at 4am in the morning?* I know we both consumed many cups but drinking coffee at 4am was not something we would do. So Dan told me he finally got up from the couch to investigate: he put the kitchen light on and noticed that despite the lovely aroma of coffee, the coffee maker wasn't even switched on, in fact it wasn't even plugged in. He found this very strange indeed. When he told me of his experience I then

looked at him with a smile and said, “Now do you believe me?”

I am very much a believer in signs and I think Elianna knew her dad was still skeptical, so she therefore had to make her point! Even though Dan had heard our daughter play the trumpet, it would take many experiences of this kind before he actually started believing that there really is something between heaven and earth that cannot be rationally explained. How can you explain hearing someone playing notes on the trumpet when there is nobody there? Yet, Dan and I heard it very clearly, and just KNEW it had to be Elianna, who used to practice regularly on her trumpet. Also, how do you rationally explain the smell of coffee in the early hours of the morning, when the coffee machine isn't even plugged in and the rest of the family are sleeping?? I don't believe anyone can explain this phenomenon, because to me these are special signs - what else could they be?

Chapter 9

Our Beloved Dogs

*I think dogs are the most amazing creatures;
they give unconditional love.
For me they are the role model for being alive.*

-
Gilda Radner

During our grief process, the dogs had been such a great source of comfort to my family and me, especially Elianna's dog, Ace. God created them to show us unconditional love and they have truly helped my family to heal in a small way throughout this turbulent journey. I feel a strong connection to Ace. I know Elianna was close to Ace and maintained a very special little friendship with him. She was always proud of him and had his picture in her mobile phone.

We had adopted Ace, a Boston terrier, from a good friend of mine. He is part blind with bad breath; he has the most terrible gas and snores rather loudly. He sleeps ALL the time and only wakes up unless he has to go outside to go potty or if he smells an aroma from the kitchen. These imperfect traits has made Elianna love him even more I think, probably because he was not a perfect specimen of a dog, but in her eyes he was the most loving and best dog anyone would wish to have. Even today I feel that somehow Elianna is sending comforting vibes through Ace, her beloved dog, which we sense

when we stroke and cuddle with him, and that is a good feeling. Daniel and Jessica have both noticed this too. They are extremely fond of all our dogs, I wish dogs would talk! They sensed something was different on the day Elianna passed on, and even today I feel this is the case. They are loving and non-judgmental and follow me around all day! When I'm lying in bed, the dogs cuddle up to me and I really do feel greatly comforted and happy they are near. They cannot speak to me or my family, but those loving dogs of ours intuitively seem to understand what we are all going through, which is comfort enough in itself.

I do know that Elianna senses the dogs have been comforting to us. Our smallest dog, Molly, a miniature dachshund is Daniel's favorite dog and has always been even since Elianna was here. Miniature dachshunds are prone to back problems because of their long backs. On a couple of occasions Molly has suffered slight back pain but somehow it goes away.

One afternoon, Molly wasn't feeling too well. She was whining quite a bit as if she was in pain probably from her back. I figured that she would be ok until the next morning when I would try to get her in to the vets. I had school that particular evening so I had to hurry as I was running late and didn't think anymore about her. After school was finished, I was on my way home and Daniel called me sobbing to tell me Molly wasn't feeling well and that she might not make it through the night. He

then put Jessica on the phone and she was crying too. I told them I would be home as soon as I could. When I arrived home I immediately went by Molly. The kids were still sobbing and Dan was trying to console them. He was glad I was home because he didn't know what to do. I tried to pick Molly up but she wouldn't let me. She seemed like she had some kind of stomach or severe back pain and I remember thinking Daniel was right and that she might not make it through the night. This is the worst I have ever seen her. We thought about calling the 24 hours vet clinic but they are located about an hour away and to be honest, Dan or I didn't want to drive anywhere at 11pm at night. I told Daniel and Jessica I would lay with Molly to keep her company and as soon as the vets opened the next day we would take Molly in to be looked at. Daniel was still crying because he truly thought that Molly wouldn't make it. He seemed very sensitive, after having lost a sister, he didn't want to lose his dog either...I understood completely and so I reassured him that I would take care of Molly through the night. Dan took both Daniel and Jessica upstairs to bed. Apparently, Dan told me afterwards that Daniel prayed as hard as he could and asked Elianna to help Molly. After all the crying, they both fell asleep.

During the night I kept touching Molly to make sure she was still with us. I didn't want to lose her either because I didn't want Daniel to go through the heartache again. Even though you cannot compare

Molly to Elianna, Molly still meant a lot to Daniel and she was his source of comfort.

As morning approached, Daniel came downstairs around 6am. I was awake and heard him whisper to me, "Mom is Molly ok?" "I think so, she is still breathing," I replied. Daniel then hesitantly picked her up and to our amazement she didn't even whine. He put her on the floor and she was walking fine. I remember thinking to myself how strange this was. It didn't really make any sense to me at all. I could understand if I had given her medicine but I hadn't given her anything. Then Daniel told me that as he slept that night, Elianna came to him in a dream, and she was holding Molly in the dream and stroking her. He remembered Elianna saying to him, "Molly is going to be fine." I could not believe what Daniel had told me. This had to mean something. Elianna heard Daniel's prayers last night and somehow helped Molly. Our dog seemed healed, after our son's dream!!! Again, was this some kind of divine intervention, some kind of spiritual healing? We will never know, but I do feel the dream had something to do with Molly's healing.

In early April of 2012, I was sitting in the living room. The house was very quiet and all three of my dogs were lying beside me sleeping, when all of a sudden I heard movement upstairs above the living room where Elianna's bedroom is. My mouth dropped open as I started to listen really hard. I remember thinking to myself "oh, my goodness it's probably Elianna coming back to visit." I have

often read about spirits of loved ones who come back and visit so I never felt afraid in fact I felt a sense of excitement her spirit was around.

Since reading so much about the afterlife and about the spirit and soul I became aware of many different things and I was not afraid. As I carefully sat up, my dog, Pepper woke up, her ears pricked up and looked up towards the ceiling and stared for about a minute, she then glanced towards the stairs. I remember Pepper not even barking even though there was activity going on. I thought this was kind of strange but maybe in her mind she knew it was Elianna? And could feel her spirit with us? I heard several movements as if somebody was jumping up and down on Elianna's bed. This lasted for a few seconds and then footsteps were heard along the hallway. A few moments later I then suddenly heard a door closing rather loudly. I was trying not to breathe during this experience because I wanted to hear as much as I could. When the movements had died down I decided to go and investigate by quietly going up the stairs with Pepper behind me.

The house was so quiet I felt my ears ringing but I was never afraid as I sensed strongly that my daughter came to visit. I went into Elianna's room and spoke to her hoping her spirit would still be around and that she would hear me. I remember saying, "Thank you for letting me know you are still around Elianna. I want you to know that you are welcome back any time, we all love you so very much." I started to cry as I curled up on her bed

hoping her energy would comfort me as I lay there. Pepper jumped up on the bed and snuggled next to me.

Several days later I started to dream of her and she would appear to me as the Elianna I once knew. She looked the same as she did before she passed. Her smile was radiant. I noticed how her eyes sparkled as we connected. Her eyes would convey to me how happy she was. The eyes are the windows to the soul which led me to believe that her soul was in a much happier place surrounded by love, comfort and joy and free from pain.

There was one dream I will not forget when Elianna appeared to me for a brief couple of seconds, looked at me and as our eyes met she told me telepathically, *Mom, part of me is always with you.* I remember waking up feeling so very comforted by those words.

Our family needed a well-deserved break by the time Easter rolled around. After so many months feeling all the emotions and the pain of losing Elianna I found that a few days away would be kind of refreshing to us. Life has to go on and I know Elianna wouldn't want us to sit feeling depressed and sad so I planned a trip to Madison, Wisconsin. This mini vacation wasn't anything too elaborate; however it was a well needed little break for 3-4 days. I did feel a sense of guilt though due to the fact that Elianna wasn't able to physically be with us.

We tried to make the best of it and looking back I believe she was there with us in spirit and as she told me in her dream that part of her is always with me.

Chapter 10

A Little Visitor

*Faith is the bird that sings
When the dawn is still dark*

-
Rabindranath Tagore

We had heard from several friends that many people were asking how we were doing as a family so I took it upon myself to write a tribute in honor of Elianna and to tell people how far we have come as a family. I spoke to my sister, Mandy, and she encouraged me to write down everything I felt in my heart and what I had learned through my reading. I would send the tribute out to everyone on her birthday, June 22, 2012. I worked on the tribute a couple of weeks beforehand and I was able to turn inwards and tune into my soul so the tribute would flow. I wanted it to come all from within. It wasn't easy to write and it did bring raw emotions to the surface but since I had this new-found strength within me, I was able to make this tribute flow.

The day before Elianna's birthday, June 21, 2012, I was coming downstairs into the kitchen. Daniel and Jessica were still in bed and Dan had left for work. As I walked into the kitchen, I could not believe my eyes, perched on the kitchen counter top was a little frog. I remember actually rubbing my eyes thinking that maybe I just happened to see something which wasn't really there but to my amazement this was a

frog in fact similar to the frog I had seen in the basement last year. I have never seen a frog on top of the kitchen counter in the 12 years we have lived in the house. I just knew that this was yet another sign from my dear daughter as she was very much attached to nature and as a little girl would constantly pick up caterpillars and frogs and look at them in wonderment. She can no longer be here with me, I figured, so she sent me a small frog in her place. It didn't sound silly at all because I know Elianna would have done something like that, it was just so typical of the way she felt so at ease with all aspects of nature. I gazed at the frog intently and then started smiling and said, "Elianna, you certainly are busy giving me signs aren't you?" It was so comforting and reassuring to know that she is alive but in a different dimension. I picked up the little frog, went outside and set him on the grass. I said to her, "Thank you for helping me, Elianna, and please continue giving me signs."

Chapter 12

A Wonderful Surprise!

We are never so lost our angels cannot find us.

-
Stephanie Powers

The day of Elianna's birthday I had invited a few of her close friends over to celebrate what would have been her 13th birthday. Earlier on that morning, about 9am, I was emailing my sister, Mandy, and making changes to the tribute, when all of a sudden, I received an email from my sister. As I began reading I became speechless and totally shocked and then I started shaking and crying at the same time. Something remarkable happened. Apparently, Elianna was coming thru to Mandy, in other words, communicating to her via thought waves. I know my sister is pretty sensible and doesn't believe in mediums but she does believe strongly in the afterlife and was able to feel this strong connection. She was surprised as I was. Dan was sat in the living room and I yelled for him to come by me. He walked over to me as I explained to him about Mandy receiving thought waves from Elianna. He was confused, yet so very surprised. My sister wrote that she felt this sudden strong connection with Elianna. She wrote that she could sense the vibes strangely happening on what would have been Elianna's birthday.

My sister wrote that Elianna somehow sensed the great sadness within our family and was communicating to her about "the wall of sadness" she says we are to break down this wall of sadness with love and understanding. My sister said that these vibes were strongly encouraging myself and my husband Dan to hug one another for a long time, united in grief, and not to say anything. I could hardly believe what my sister was writing. She had to type as fast as she could so she could get everything down Elianna was telling her. It was amazing. Elianna knew that everyone, including family and all the doctors at the hospital did everything they could to help her but it wasn't meant to be; she had so wanted to live but had no choice.

My dear daughter conveyed to my sister that she sensed it was her time to go and the sooner she accepted this, the better it was for her so she could go on spiritually living and learning on the other side. My sister said Elianna sensed that we were all around her until the very end but she is saying that the end is "only the beginning," and is not the end at all because the soul lives on as she knows. Mandy told me she got the clear impression that Elianna loves and misses her brother and sister, as well as her school and the teachers.

I think Mandy was surprised at all these urgent thought waves coming through, yet strangely every single one of them made perfect sense. Elianna was apparently communicating to my sister that she

missed a particular teacher, called Mrs. K. Mandy said that Elianna did not convey the teacher's name just the first letter of the teacher's last name; we now know who this lady is and we were astounded at this knowledge coming through, my sister certainly could not have known this, living 4,000 miles away! Apparently, Mrs. K was Elianna's drama teacher known as Mrs. Kofron. I ended up calling Mrs. Kofron to tell her the news and she was completely shocked. To my surprise Mrs. Kofron told me that Elianna always used to call her only by the first initial of her last name, something I didn't know either. Mandy also said that Elianna seemed to miss her dog Ace very much, a special dog she was saying. The thoughts, said my sister were coming thru thick and fast and she had to type quickly to get it all across to me, she realized there was limited time, everything was so intense and real.

Elianna conveyed to my sister that she really missed my caring nature and particularly admired my strength as a mother in pulling through this tragedy. She knew we did everything we could to help her before she finally passed although she told my sister that she wasn't meant to recover and that it wasn't meant for her to live. Elianna knew we were with her to the very end. Just before this strong vibrational connection began to fade, Mandy said that Elianna had seemed to have understood her untimely passing and had told her that she has another important spiritual role to fulfill in heaven. After this, I was absolutely astounded and deeply moved, I just could not stop crying. My daughter

came through to my sister?! This was crazy, unreal, but no, it was true. I believed my sister completely. Since I have a number of books at home which speak about the spirit and the soul and about life after death I know in my heart this all made perfect sense to me.

My husband Dan didn't know what to think and at the time he had more trouble accepting this. It's not something a person would expect after losing a child, and especially having their wife's sister communicating with the child they lost. But to me this was profoundly moving, and ironically it set the healing process in motion for me. After hearing this, I knew clearly there had to be something between heaven and earth and this was a breakthrough, like the sun blasting through my dark heavy cloud of grief. My husband Dan now seems to sense this also, and I know he is slowly healing too. The road of grief is often long and lonely and many stones need to be moved out of the way, but it is not without its lighter moments. Moments like my sister shared with me, for whom I am grateful, with messages from beyond conveying to me indirectly, that there is really life after death and that there are so many great lessons to be learned.



October 2007 – Halloween
Elianna, Daniel and Jessica



December 2007 - Disney World Louise,
Dan, Elianna, Daniel and Jessica



June 2008 – After a mud fight -
Elianna, Jessica and Daniel



August 2008 - Elianna in cowboy hat



September 2010 – Elianna, Jessica and
Daniel waiting for school bus



December 2010 – Elianna
holding her sister Jessica



December 2010 – Elianna, Daniel
and Jessica with Santa



July 2011 - Elianna fishing

Chapter 13

Our First Summer without Elianna

*You're only here for a short visit. Don't hurry, don't worry.
And be sure to smell the flowers along the way.*

Walter Hagen 1892-1969

Our first summer without Elianna seemed to actually go by rather quickly. I had intentionally kept the kids busy so that the grief of having lost their sister wouldn't hit them as much since it was their first summer without her. Dan opened the pool and the kids had their friends over. It was very difficult for Dan opening the pool because Elianna had always loved to spend many hours swimming in the water. I know the higher powers were giving him great strength at the time and still having Daniel and Jessica around us helped us tremendously, strength wise. They were the reason too why Dan and I could make it through the day. Our two children needed us and they were quite simply the main reason why we should carry on as a family. I would visit with my best friend, Stacey and on many occasions we would reminisce about the early days when the kids were little. She would come to the house with her daughter. Her daughter would swim in the pool and we would sit on the swing and talk of Elianna, crying tears of sadness. We would discuss spirituality and I would fill her in on all the signs and dreams I received from Elianna as well as the wonderful time she came through to my sister

on her birthday, June 22. My friend, Stacey was also like a "rock" to me and I found that we had grown together through this very sad time.

We would often talk about the butterfly whose presence we experienced that summer as we sat on the deck by the pool watching the kids play in the water, this colorful little insect kept us company for a long time. We all were quite amazed how long the butterfly stayed around. The kids would walk by it and this little insect would calmly stay put. Even the splashing of water didn't frighten the butterfly away. Could this yet again be a little sign from our dear daughter?

That particular summer we saw a number of frogs around the house at different times. One day I was weeding in the back yard, thinking of Elianna when all of a sudden a frog appeared from nowhere. I remember acknowledging the frog as if it was Elianna. This little sign warmed my heart and my soul.

My mom came to visit in July and I was so happy to see her. This time, the four of us went down to meet her at the airport. It was a bittersweet time because Elianna was always with us and always so excited to see her grandma just like Daniel and Jessica but sadly this wasn't meant to be. My mom and I spoke often about Elianna, reminiscing of the fond memories, smiling and crying. I know my mom felt sad because she sensed the void while she was here but thanks to my newly found strength and

spiritual wisdom I was able enlighten my mom's way of thinking so she could see the bigger plan to all of this.

On August 11, a year since Elianna had passed, I had organized a balloon launch in honor of her at the school. A dear friend helped me organize the balloon launch and I was very appreciative of her helping me. Dan and I were in good spirits that day because this special day was about remembering our daughter and the special girl she was. We invited our very close friends and family and the students from Elianna's class. I was so happy to have our immediate family there including my mom. Having the immediate family there made things a little easier for us. It was absolutely perfect weather on the morning of with the sun shining out of the clear blue sky, with a pleasant breeze. It was the perfect weather to fly a kite or hold a balloon launch – and I remember thinking how I wished Elianna could have been here to witness it on this lovely day!.

Everyone was very kind and supportive and we all took time to honor her as a number of Elianna's classmates read poetry and shared memorable stories about her. Despite the sad occasion, the atmosphere at the balloon ceremony was wonderfully comforting to me. We each wrote a little heartfelt note to Elianna and each tied the note to our individual balloons. Then a poem was read out by Elianna's aunt Sarah which was written by my sister. As we let go of the balloons I still remember the sea of purple balloons filtering

through the clouds as we finally let them go, making their way towards heaven. It was a spectacular sight to see. A part of me hoped deep down that Elianna would see this lovely cloud of purple balloons floating towards her and that she somehow would understand what this meant.

12 bright balloons
Will be sent on their way
On this bittersweet summer's day
1 balloon to bring us hope
So that we should not sit around and mope
2 balloons for wisdom and strength
So that we may climb the highest fence
3 balloons for those little tears
As we celebrate those 12 earthly years
4 balloons for games and fun
To remind us that life has just begun
5 balloons to remember your school
As you abided by every rule
6 balloons for Dan and Lou
Who protected you your whole life through
7 balloons for Daniel and Jess
The brother and sister who loved you the best
8 balloons for your lovely red hair
Where even strangers would stop and stare
9 balloons for your athletic grace
And the beautiful smile upon your face
10 balloons from your favorite dog, Ace
Who still has a glum look on his face.
11 balloons for your time on earth
And understanding your worth
12 balloons for peace and love
As all float upwards, to heaven above.

Written by Amanda Jane Penny

Chapter 14

Recipients of Elianna's Organs

Strength does not come from winning. Your struggles develop your strengths. When you go through hardships and decide not to surrender, that is strength.

-

Arnold Schwarzenegger

During the summer 2012 we were invited to the Governor's house in Madison to honor our daughter. There were as many as 200 people who had been invited. These people were all family members honoring their loved ones who had given the gift of life to others. The Governor's house was located on Lake Mendota, overlooking the lake. It was a truly beautiful property. The location had a sense of peace and tranquility about it which my soul was able to tune into and embrace. Everyone was very friendly and we were making polite conversation as we sat under a huge marquee tent. All the families had brought pictures of their loved ones; many of the family members sadly embracing their pictures of their loved one as they carefully seated themselves. They would call our name individually, one by one and the families would make their way to the front to be presented with a medal and to have their picture taken with the Governor. Although on this particular day the governor had an emergency meeting, so the Governor's deputy had to cover for him instead.

In October 2012 we received a letter from the Blood Center of Wisconsin detailing us information about Elianna's gift of tissue donation. I amazed myself how strong I had become reading the letter compared to where I was a year ago. Elianna's death was still very fresh; however, I felt strong enough to read this very important letter. Elianna helped many people, which has been unbelievable. Elianna has had such a huge impact on so many lives, through our generous donation; we have given hope and life to others. As of today, at least 69 people have been helped through the gift of tissue donation, and as far as the Blood Center of Wisconsin is aware, 168 grafts are available for transplant. This was so amazing and comforting to hear that all these individuals-from 33 different states in America and also including three Canadian provinces which had benefitted from our daughter's young and healthy living tissue. This was also some comfort to Dan who also bravely and selflessly agreed to donate our daughter's organs.

During the past couple of years we have received letters from most of the recipients who received Elianna's organs, the recipients who received her heart, lungs, pancreas, liver and kidneys. The recipients we have heard from are doing amazingly well. Dan and I have been comforted by the letters of these grateful recipients, knowing that our young, healthy daughter, Elianna, was indirectly able to help each and every one of them. Since that day, donating Elianna's organs was a huge turning point in our lives. After receiving the letter a year ago,

October 2011, I believe in my heart this was “closure” since I had to quickly accept that Elianna would never be coming back. Her organs were healthy, young and intact and because of this we wanted to make a difference helping others. Several people have asked me if I ever would like to meet any of the recipients, maybe for “closure purposes”. However, I don’t see meeting them for “closure purposes” since Dan and I have moved on from this point. Although my daughter’s heart may be beating within someone else, which is incredibly awesome and to know that Elianna’s own heart has given that person a new life. However, the idea of Elianna’s heart living within someone else is still a little strange to me as her mother, for this person is still not my daughter. Elianna’s spirit is around us, in our hearts, mind and soul, as a whole person complete with organs. To me, organs are material and not the true self. I have seen Elianna in my dreams as her whole self, and in my mind’s eye, this is all I need to see.

Nethertheless, Dan and I are deeply glad that through our donation all the recipients were given another-and better-chance at life and we certainly wish them all the very best.

Chapter 15

Children and Grief

When we meet real tragedy in life, we can react in two ways—either by losing hope and falling into self-destructive habits, or by using the challenge to find our inner strength.

-

Dalai Lama

The days rolled on and I could tell that Dan was getting a little stronger. I know that my newfound spiritual strength helped him tremendously especially by getting through the dark days. I found myself to be the "rock" of my family and I never once felt that this strength was heaviness on my shoulders. This newfound strength was a wonderful blessing from God and I often relentlessly thank him for this. I also know Elianna has been sending me vibes because I have sensed her energy around me on several occasions and I have learned to be open so that I can embrace so many magnificent signs that are spiritually sent to me.

One morning, I went into Jessica's bedroom and sat on her bed. I knew she was kind of awake because I heard her talking to the dogs earlier. As I sat there, her eyes opened and she smiled at me and said, "Mom, I felt Elianna's energy with me last night and she was lying next to me." I was so very happy to hear this. She then said, "I dreamed of my sister, and you know what Mom? She sang to me along with the angels." I was deeply moved by Jessica's

dream of her sister and replied in tears, "The angels, really, that is amazing." I knew this experience comforted Jessica, but it comforted me also. I said, "How long did they sing for?" I wanted to know all the details. She replied as she was stroking Ace, "Only a few seconds. And there were many of them, or it seemed." So Elianna, in her spiritual way was reminding Jessica that she had not gone anywhere and would always be with her. I thanked Elianna in my own way for bringing this wonderful sign to her little sister - it was well needed.

Both Daniel and Jessica miss their sister. I truly wish they didn't have to grieve and that I could wave a magic wand for it all to go away, however, from my own experience I realize that to get through the valley of tears they are going to have to walk down this painful road of grief.

I would constantly talk of Elianna to Daniel and Jessica to remind them both that their sister is still around them in spirit and always will be. It did not happen at first, but eventually they were able to find the strength to also talk of her in a loving and funny way which showed me how far they have come with their grief.

However, on one occasion, Daniel looked at me and said, "Mom, can you please stop talking about her?" I was a little taken a back at his remark and asked why. Knowing that he had offended me slightly he lowered his tone of voice and said, "Because it makes me sad if I talk about her all the time." It

was then when I came to the realization that we all grieve differently from one another in our own unique way.

Children have a different way internalizing their grief I think. I do feel that one day Daniel and Jessica will open up and learn more about their grief and how it affected them and how my grief had an effect on them. I have always talked about Elianna little by little and would never shut grief out. From the day their sister passed I have been open and honest since gaining this amazing inner light, strength and wisdom. I have been able to build their strength also to comfort and to guide them. On many occasions I have spoken to Daniel about Elianna and about the afterlife and what a true blessing it is to witness her in many different ways. I believe not everybody gets to experience such unbelievable signs from their loved ones as often as we have.

I do believe that Daniel and Jessica will probably open up more so when they are older and with more life experiences to fall back on, which will help them understand better what happened, on a deeper level. They will then be able to see the bigger picture because more parts of the grief will become visible to their maturing minds. They can only deal with certain aspects of their grief according to their mental development and right now they can only deal with a small window of grief, especially Jessica because she lost her big sister whom she seemed to idolize. I do believe Jessica misses Elianna more

than she probably thinks herself. And I do feel there is still some grief hidden in Jessica which will hopefully come out later because it will help the healing process. I know that Daniel felt a sense of guilt when he woke his sister on that particular morning because he told me. He figured if he hadn't have woken her then she wouldn't have died. I explained to him many times that it was not his fault for waking her up and for him not to carry that kind of guilt on his shoulders. I often told him this was a good thing he woke her as we were able to spend a few precious moments with her. I also told him that Elianna sensed in her final moments that her family was all around her and that she felt the love we all had of her too. She passed knowing she was very much loved and that is important. The only thing you can take out of this world is love I told Daniel.

I have often thanked God and all the angels for helping Elianna make the transition to the other side during that difficult time. I have shed many tears of comfort thanking them and knowing that she is in a good place with loving spiritual beings around her. Because we are so focused living here on earth, we forget to thank the Higher Beings on the other side. Elianna was a young girl when she left us and I am thankful that her transition was made easier, guided by her angels.

Chapter 16

The Road Sign

*We are not human beings on a spiritual journey we are
spiritual beings on a human journey.*

*-
Stephen Covey*

Dan turned to me one day to ask me what my thoughts would be of having a sign on our road honoring our daughter. When she was a young girl she liked to go walking with us and she would pick up cans and bottles from the side of the road. It started to become a competition to see who would be able to pick up the most cans and bottles between and Elianna and her brother and sister. Besides that, I knew deep down Elianna, in her own little way felt good that she was helping to protect our environment which in turn motivated Dan and I.

Even though the tree at the school was a beautiful memorial, we wanted something we could see, something around us so we can be reminded of Elianna each and every day and which in turn will help us in a small way to cope with our grief.

I started to look for sign companies and then a friend of mine gave me an E-mail address to a sign company that she had used before. I E-mailed the company and within a day or two, one of the owners replied back to me. As we were E-mailing

back and forth I found out that the owner had also lost a son who had recently passed away, also at the tender age of 12. I knew then and there that this was not a coincidence and I know deep down that this connection was meant to be. I found this unbelievably amazing. There were too many similarities between both of our children, both having suddenly passed away at 12 years of age. These wonderful people were generous enough to donate the sign to us which was very touching. We planned on them driving down to meet us and to bring the sign so we could install the sign together. This family was also going through grief of losing their son so it was a sad time for both families but also a very special time, as they understood exactly what we were going through too. Our joint grief over losing our first-born suddenly brought our families for a brief time together.

Good friends of ours who knew Elianna well were willing to have the sign installed on a small part of their property which runs alongside the road. It seemed that everything started falling into place and I believe in my heart that this was all meant to be.

It was nice to meet the family after corresponding via E-mail for many weeks. When they arrived, I was slightly nervous but as soon as we met them I felt a peace and a connection. We shook hands and hugged. When they presented the sign to us I started to cry because seeing my daughter's name on the sign will remind people of Elianna when they drive by. Dan and I don't want our daughter to ever be

forgotten so this was an important honor for her. We installed the sign and said a prayer for both our children, who had been taken from us at 12.

That day though, I felt this wonderful energy around us. There was some kind of massive energy field which opened up and "carried" us which explained how wonderful and harmonious everything was. I believe the spiritual vibes helped us. The spiritual powers which surrounded Elianna and their son, sent out a wonderful field of positive energy which gently surrounded us all, softly holding us in some kind of soft protective cloud or some kind of security blanket so this is why we felt this amazing connection to each other, everyone must have felt this, I am sure!! We still felt this empowering and calming energy several days later, it was just so unbelievable.

This was something Dan needed. Another father to share his pain; someone who understands exactly what he is going through. Both fathers being at one another's side was enough. The spiritual vibes were working together to comfort us all; flowing between each one of us and helping us.

Chapter 17

Dream

When we leave this world, how much we have loved will be our true legacy. It is the only thing we will leave behind and carry with us.

-
Anne Siloy

The end of 2012 came very quickly. This was now our second Christmas without Elianna. It was still difficult for us but we felt stronger this time around. I think it was largely because of my spiritual development during my grief process; I know I have moved on in my grief process and overcome some very difficult barriers. As a result I have become stronger and better able to deal with any aspect of this harrowing tragedy and bravely embracing it with open arms. I feel wiser now than ever before. Also, since I had read so much about grief and experienced it first-hand, I came to the realization that we all need to be more insightful about grieving. Instead of being fearful, we need to focus on showing someone they are not alone and to help communicate in some way like the 3 simple words I had mentioned earlier.

In a way it's difficult to truly understand the whole concept of why people do disappear or shy away from someone but then again most of us are fearful of death and fearful of making someone cry since there are many emotions which come into play

during this journey of grief. To lose a child is such a devastating blow to happen to any parent as normally the child succeeds the parent and not the other way around. I know my husband Dan and I will never see our beloved daughter graduate, get married, have a career or a family, but we do feel that she is in a comforting place surrounded by Gods light in her newfound heavenly home.

January 2013, I will never, ever forget the spiritual dream I had of Elianna. The dream was so heart rendering to me. I felt her presence so strongly that I knew she was here with me. I dreamed I woke up one night and came downstairs. As I was entering the kitchen, I looked towards my left and saw Elianna laying on the couch in the living room. I remember being so shocked in the dream and I could not believe I saw my daughter. She was laying down, dressed in white, her eyes closed and her beautiful red hair falling around her shoulders. Her skin was milky white. I can always remember how peaceful she looked and so angelic.

I sat down beside her and started to talk to her. "Elianna is it really you?" She nodded slowly. I knew in the dream that I couldn't touch her, maybe because if I did I would wake up and the dream would end and I didn't want the dream to end. I sensed with her eyes closed she was in some sort of a deep spiritual state of her own. I said "Are you ok?" She again nodded. "Everybody loves you Elianna and we are always thinking of you." She nodded yet again. "Daniel and Jessica miss you so

much, and so do dad and I." She understood everything I was saying. I just knew that even though she didn't have her eyes open she still heard me. I then started to talk as quickly as I could and to tell her everything, but the more I tried to say, the harder it was for me to speak because my words started becoming heavier and heavier. As she nodded to me one last time I noticed her smiling but still with her eyes closed. I then woke up. I lay in bed for a few minutes thinking about just what happened. I ended up going downstairs and then I started crying relentlessly because I know that this dream was real. I could sense this so very, very strongly. Through my tears I started to talk to myself out loud. *I just saw her. My daughter came to me. I know she came to me. It was her. I just saw Elianna.* Oh my goodness. I hadn't encountered seeing my daughter in such a long time and then she came to me in this wonderfully amazing dream. She had been sent to me.

The following day I just felt this strong wave of grief come through me like a tidal wave. My emotions yet again poured out from my soul. I felt like I was re-living the grief process from the beginning. I just couldn't help thinking about this dream, playing it over and over again in my mind wanting to re-live the dream so I could once again be close to her and to feel her presence.

Chapter 18

"She knows I am in the play."

Death takes the body, God takes the soul, our mind holds the memories, our heart keeps the love, and our faith lets us know we will meet again.

-

Nishan Panwar

In the early part of 2013 Daniel began practicing for the school play. He had auditioned and got the part of Lord Vladi. Daniel was more into sports than performing. Elianna used to continually talk to him to try out for the play but he really didn't seem too bothered. I think like most children, he had a touch of stage fright. Elianna used to always say to him, "Daniel when you are on stage you can only see the first two rows because of the stage lighting. And plus, it's so much fun!" I remember her smiling when she told him this. I had also reminded Daniel of what his sister used to tell him and as time went on he began to listen. His dad and I were happy he gained the confidence to go ahead and try out. He would have made his sister proud.

One morning, as Daniel was getting ready for school, he turned to me and said, "Mom, I had a dream about Elianna last night." I loved it when the kids heard from her or dreamed of her because I still feel she is continually connected to us. I wanted to know all the details. Daniel then continued, "You, Dad, Jessica, Elianna, and I were all standing in the

kitchen and then Elianna turned to me and said, "You are going to do well in the play."

I paused for a minute and said, "Really, Elianna said that? See she is always with you and always knows what is going on."

Daniel then replied, "Well, she wasn't actually talking to me, but her mind was mind talking to my mind."

"She is communicating with you telepathically," I explained.

"Yes, he replied and then she kept going on and on about the play and then I suddenly woke up. I don't remember everything she actually said but I know she was talking about the play."

Several days after the dream, Daniel was sitting in math class, when Elianna came to him in a vision. He wasn't thinking about her at all but I think Elianna wanted to validate once and for all that she knew he was in the play. Daniel was excited about telling me as he came in from school. "Mom, Elianna came to me today in a vision. I was on stage and I looked out at the audience and I was drawn to this shining light at the back of the gym which could have only been Elianna. She was smiling and clapping at me. There were other people in the audience but I didn't notice them, only Elianna!" I could have cried there and then because this vision was so moving and beautiful. Elianna was communicating to Daniel via dreams and visions

that she does know what is going on in our lives and the fact she is happy he was continuing something that she had a passion for in this life. I believe that this intense bright light Daniel saw was a sign of encouragement from Elianna and he has never forgotten this amazing vision he had experienced.

I have spoken to the drama teacher, Mrs. Kofron and she tells me that she senses Elianna's energy at drama practices. This is wonderful to hear.

Throughout the weeks I had met with a couple of the girls from Elianna's class who knew her very well and they also excitedly told me that they also felt her energy around and one of Elianna's friends had several dreams about her. Elianna told her friend in the dream that she couldn't stay long and that she had to get back. Her friend asked her why she had to go but Elianna didn't answer her directly but just the fact she had to leave.

I believe there are certain aspects of the afterlife that we aren't supposed to know since we are living here in the physical world but one day when we pass we will find out.

Chapter 19

Wise Words from Elianna

When you lose someone close, remember that they are in a better place now, and live your life for you and for them.

Amber Hope

My sister, Mandy, has been an amazing comfort to me during this difficult journey. She has helped and guided me along my journey. This journey is sometimes long and sad, but it is not without its tender and funny moments. The road is sometimes uneven and rocky but I know I will be alright. I look straight ahead and see the sun which warms my soul and whenever there is light there is hope. My sister understands this completely and it is so comforting to me that she has been able to share my grief with me over the past 2 1/2 years. I have learned so much from her and she has learned a lot from me. She says she is absolutely amazed at my spiritual progress and deep understanding, which was brought about by Elianna's untimely passing. This spiritual energy I have felt from day one when I experienced the surge of energy when my daughter passed, this wonderful spiritual energy carrying me through my journey and which up to the present day has in fact never let me down.

Death changes the way we look at life and death is also an opportunity for growth. I don't waste time focusing on the past nor do I waste time focusing

on the future because in my opinion this takes the enjoyment out of living for today, and really, today is all we have. I feel differently about life due to the fact that I simply don't have to prove myself. Tragedies sometimes bring out certain qualities in people. I have learned to be content with who I am and I am very grateful that I have been able to recognize my own strengths and abilities and to try to stay positive about life. I try not to take anything for granted.

I truly believe that people are in our lives for a reason during certain times. They come in to help us during particular phases of our lives. Many old friendships fade and new friendships begin. The friends who stay with us are the friendships we should hold onto and treasure the most because these friendships are hard to find. I have found that the true friendships are the ones where both friends have one another's interests at heart and are always there for you when you need them. Friendships, are like a marriage where there has to be some kind of "give and take" in order for them to work.

My sister, Mandy and I have become closer since Elianna's passing. She has been able to uplift and comfort me through the raw pain and the heavy darkness which burdened my soul. I believe Elianna feels this very strongly and since my sister is sensitive to spiritual vibes, I think Elianna will always try to find ways to communicate through to her.

On March 7th 2013 I was communicating to my sister, via E-mail. I was very sad that day. Grief comes in waves and there are days when we long to see our loved ones again. Days where I sit in disbelief thinking about the fact she has gone, a tragedy I still find so difficult to accept. The knowledge that Elianna is gone and will never be coming back physically to see us is extremely painful, but as long as we live in this physical world we are going to feel pain as our physical body comes with feelings and emotions.

However, on this day, Elianna actually managed to communicate through to my sister whilst she was E-mailing me. I believe Elianna knew I was very sad and my sister was in a relaxed enough state for her to come through. This happens when a person somehow raises their vibrational level which makes it easier for the loved one to come through. This was something I so desperately needed and I am still amazed to this very day that Elianna can connect with my sister. This is such a wonderful, rare and unique gift and I embrace this gift whole heartedly.

As I was reading through the E-mail I started to sob but at the same time I felt comforted. I couldn't read this E-mail fast enough because I was so excited that Elianna came to her.

Elianna spoke to my sister, via thought waves, or telepathy, if you will. Once again, my sister was typing as quickly as she could. Elianna is happy that we are all now "stable" and that she wishes she

could be there with us but cannot because she has higher spiritual assignments to deal with. She communicated to my sister that she misses her friends and her dogs, and asks me if her favorite dog, Ace, is eating properly and are we going to get the 4th dog we were talking about. She is happy that Daniel got a part in the school play and should concentrate on his school work more. She is not worried about Jessica because she is a very strong natured and can hold her own but misses her as a sister. She is saying that she now has a sister in her soul group.

She says that she has to come through to my sister as a plane of understanding between her and my family and that we have to "bridge the gap" as the grief surrounding her untimely passing had left a huge hole of emptiness behind. I think she meant we should try to "bridge the gap" between heaven and earth, between our heavenly dimension and her new one, if you will. Elianna seemed to understand the high level of spiritual understanding between Mandy and I called a "silver connection. Having this connection is very good and it seemed that Elianna wanted my sister to keep this up.

Through telepathy, she conveyed to my sister that she was surprised she lost her organs so quickly but understood that it had to be done quickly to help so many others on this earthly plane which is a good thing. Elianna now recognizes, in her new spiritual home, that the soul is 100 times more important than any organ anyway. Elianna seemed to have

been sad she lost her heart but she understood it was transplanted in someone so grateful, but the soul knows more than the heart does. The soul has everything that could be wished for she said.

Through telepathic thought, Elianna conveyed to my sister that she understood all of our actions, at the time of her passing, the way our family were serene and the way we handled it all so very well, including having the organs be transplanted. She then told my sister that she understood we could not wait long and that Dan and I had to act quickly and agree for the organs to be immediately removed to help others, in spite of the terrible grief at the time of her passing. Elianna seemed to understand all of this and she says if she were here today she would be standing between us all embracing our family. She loved us all very much. She never wants to be forgotten; she conveyed to my sister that the idea of planting a tree at the school in her memory was very cool indeed. The last telepathic thoughts my sister received from Elianna was that we should never worry or lose faith, as the soul never dies and part of her is always around us. Trust in your heart is what she seemed to be saying.

This is such a blessing, it truly is. My daughter once again communicating through my sister!!! I must have read the E-mail several times with tears streaming down my face. It was strange but deeply comforting. Now my sister is pretty skeptical and does not normally believe in anything like this, but on this particular day she said these thoughts came

through, urgent, jumbled, thick and fast. She was as surprised as we were but was happy she had somehow helped us a little in our grief.

I was very fascinated when I found out what the term *silver connection* meant. This means that whenever a person has another person whom they are inter-related to, i.e. brother, sister, mother, father, aunt, uncle or grandparents, this phrase, *silver connection* stands for being one another's relative for 25 lifetimes or more. My sister, Mandy and I have been each others relative for 25 incarnations. This term is commonly mentioned in the heavenly realm, yet unfamiliar to us here on earth. (<http://hopefrombeyond.weebly.com>)

It is still very difficult for Dan to accept the fact that Elianna had communicated to Mandy. He is trying to make sense of his grief still so Elianna, telepathically sending messages once again, seemed to overwhelm him a little at that time.

Dan has also suffered terribly through this tragedy and still suffering today but I believe my spiritual strength is helping to heal him little by little. I see a difference in him and I truly believe if it wasn't for this amazing strength that has been filtering through me, Dan would not have been able to pull through this as well. Since he was going through tremendous pain within, he wasn't able to support me as much as he might have wanted to. Although, Dan seems to have reached a plateau where he is at an even keel, which is a small sign of progress.

Most of us go through this journey of grief at different speeds. Since I feel that I have been the rock of the family and seem to understand the big picture, I have made the mistake of rambling on too much thinking Dan and Daniel are in the same place as me. I do understand now that not everybody experiences the same emotions and feelings together. This is what Dan and I have experienced. Some emotions and feelings associated with the grief process, I have yet to experience or may never experience, whereas Dan has. Certain emotions or feelings can take many months for one person to overcome, whereas another person can experience the same pain for a shorter amount of time.

This is why, in my experience, it is essential to have a good friend to talk to. Someone who you are close with and who are prepared to listen to help curb the anger, sadness and the depression. Dan and I are lucky in this area. Besides his family he has a wonderful group of friends and I have my dear sister, my mom and my best friend, Stacey who I am able to share my rawness and deep pain with as I travel down the long path throughout my turbulent journey.

Back in 2013, my husband, Dan experienced a very spiritual dream he had of Elianna. He dreamed he took Elianna, Daniel and Jessica for a ride in his truck. They came home to find the house had been robbed and everything was gone. The pictures of

Elianna, and everything else which belonged to her were untouched. This particular dream to me conveyed that material assets can be gone in an instant but Elianna will always be around him because the soul lives on.

When I explained dream to Dan, he did understand the meaning behind it. Our daughter is trying to tell her dad that she is still around because I believe she wants him to understand that she hasn't gone anywhere and that she is just in a different place, and her soul is still with us. This was a very significant dream for my husband who is now making some progress but at the time was grasping to make sense of the tragedy. I also learned from this dream too.

Chapter 20

Stuck Like Glue

Cherish your vision; cherish your ideals; cherish the music that stirs in your heart, the beauty that forms in your mind, the loveliness that drapes your purist thoughts. If you remain true to them, your world will at least be built.

-
James Allen

The summer before Elianna passed, a song that Elianna used to play quite often was *Stuck Like Glue* by Sugarland. The song is very upbeat and happy which suited Elianna, you might even say she was stuck on it!

Since her passing I have occasionally listened to the song on the radio. In the very beginning it was very difficult for me to listen to this particular song so I would turn the radio off right away. Some days I knew as I was driving that it was indeed Elianna sending me this song to let me know she is around.

The school has their yearly talent show where the children perform and the parents come and watch. This particular talent show the students sang *Stuck Like Glue*. This is when certain things trigger and we are reminded of that person. This "trigger" could go either way. You could be uplifted one minute but then the next minute you could feel great sadness within.

As the song began playing I suddenly started to shake a little. My heart started to race, my face felt very warm and I started to sweat. I felt that I was having some kind of panic attack so I got up and walked out of the gym into the hallway so I could give myself some space. I have never experienced a panic attack before and I was pretty sure this was one. Jessica told me as she was sat watching the song being performed also and she too felt very sad and that she indeed shed a couple of tears. I reassured her that Elianna is around us, helping us to heal and that she very well knows our pain.

About six months later, the school hosted their first Harvest of Rythm where each grade danced to three songs. One of the three songs Jessica's class danced to was *Stuck Like Glue*. I thought out of all the songs to choose from Jessica's class had to perform to this particlar favourite of Elianna's which made it extra difficult for Jessica. I asked her how she felt about this and she told me at first she felt sad but after rehearsing the dance moves several times and listening to the song she started to get used to the song and no longer felt as sad. I told her how strong she was but I also told her that it's also ok to cry. She taught me something too, that life indeed goes on. I admit I was a little reluctant to go and watch Jessica's class perform due to the painful memories but I could not let Daniel or Jessica down.

As Jessica's class were performing their three songs, I noticed a reporter from the newspaper taking

pictures and talking to the students. Apparently the school secretary had invited the reporter to take pictures since this was a new and fun event for every student at the school to participate in.

When *Stuck Like Glue* started playing I was surprised how calm I was within and that I didn't feel upset at all. I actually quite enjoyed listening to the song since it reminded me of Elianna in a fun and positive way. Jessica performed very well and I could tell she enjoyed participating in this fun event also.

A few days passed by and a friend called to tell us that Jessica's picture was in the paper, I figured it was from the Harvest of Rythm, but I didn't think much more about it until I saw the picture in the paper myself. Out of all the 200 plus children at the school, Jessica was the only child who was in the paper, There were a couple of other children in the background but Jessica was the only student who we could see clearly. Surprisingly, underneath was the caption describing the song she was dancing to *Stuck Like Glue*. I asked the school secretary if she knew anything about this since she set it up and she had no idea. She too was shocked when I told her. Jessica had never mentioned anything to the reporter either. I sense that Elianna had something to do with this and probably in her way was telling us that she was there!

Chapter 21

More Visions, Dreams and Energies

*Knowing in your heart that they have found their peace and
that life can go on again and that we come out of our grief in
one piece enriched and humbled from the experience,
however sad.*

-
Amanda Jane Penny

The year, 2013, seemed an active year for our family where we experienced so many visions, dreams, thought waves, signs and energy. Our dear daughter was continually communicating to us conveying that she is still around in spirit.

Jessica continuously sees 22 all the time, mostly when she looks at the clock, she sees 10:22 am, 3:22 pm, etc. Also at school basketball games when watching Daniel play she looks up and sees the score is 22 or 2 and 2. My sister, Mandy, tells me this is actually the Spiritual Law of Resonance and happens when Elianna's spirit is with her.

Daniel experienced Elianna's energy in English class one time. He told me this warm, comforting energy stayed with him for about 20 minutes and he knew it was his dear sister. He wasn't afraid at all, he was wonderfully comforted by the presence of her. These experiences make me so happy and I feel that Elianna is watching over them as their guardian angel.

Jessica has had a couple of dreams of Elianna where Elianna has taken hold of Jessica's hand for a brief second but then Elianna had to let go of her hand and fly away. My belief is that although both sisters are apart physically, Elianna is letting Jessica know that she is always with her in a spiritual sense.

Dan has also had many real dreams of Elianna. One dream he distinctly remembered was when she was in the hospital bed and she climbed out of bed to give her dad a big hug and then he woke up. Our daughter is forever with us always.

The ongoing experiences from Elianna have lifted my heavy heart. I feel that I am further along with my newfound spirituality which in turn has helped me gain strength in other areas of my life by helping me to move forward and to continue supporting my husband and my family in the best way I possibly can.

I have learned to let go of Elianna through this wonderful spiritual strength so she can continue on growing and learning in the afterlife.

I am continuing with school and have since done very well despite the painful journey I have had to endure. Part of my continuation with school is to make Elianna proud. She was very proud of me going back to school when she was here so I am in part doing this for her and of course to prove to myself that I am able to accomplish this goal. Both

Daniel and Jessica are doing well at school too. I know Elianna would be proud of us all.

Daniel's play went well. I couldn't believe he was able to mimic such a good English accent. Actually, it was more of a mix of an English and Australian one! Many people thought that I had coached Daniel but I hadn't. He seemed to have picked up the accent effortlessly from listening to me all the time. Being in the play gave Daniel confidence and it was refreshing to see him on stage instead of playing basketball, baseball or soccer however, at the same time, a wave of sadness instilled within us because this brought back many memories of Elianna. I realise that life doesn't stop. As my grandmother used to say, time and tide wait for no man. It's simply all about picking up the pieces and moving on and making the most of life and carrying on the best we can but also very importantly finding the time to grieve along the way.

My sister has had several visions of Elianna since she communicated with her two months ago. It just seems endless in a wonderful way, giving me comfort and joy and the excitement of passing these experiences on to others to let everyone know that there is another world besides this earthly life and that we do live on.

One morning while laying in bed my sister suddenly got this clear vision of Elianna. She was standing behind my grandmother, who we were apparently close to in this life, with her hands on my

grandmother's shoulders. Elianna's hair was waving around her head like she was a mermaid under the sea and everything was in slow motion. There were swirling colors around them, in the shades of pinks and pale blues.

During this vision my sister told me that she was surprised to see Elianna with my Grandma. Elianna conveyed to my sister that she didn't know our grandma in her earthly life but she does know her now in heaven. This was correct since Elianna was only 9 months old when my grandma passed away.

One evening my sister, Mandy was walking home from work listening to her head phones when all of a sudden she got the feeling that Elianna was walking alongside of her. She didn't see her but she felt her presence strongly. My sister walked a little of the way but then felt that Elianna was slightly lagging behind but again seemed very near. No words were spoken just the feeling of her presence. As Mandy continued to listen to her music on her headphones, she must have tuned Elianna out but as she turned the corner something made her look around once more, and she was just in time to see Elianna laughing and waving with her right hand, before she disappeared into what she could only describe as a large circle of bright yellow light. Elianna apparently turned into the light, still smiling, and walked into and through it, disappearing completely. She was wearing a green floaty dress, her lovely hair, loose, and her feet were bare. I am sure it must have been awesome for my sister to see

Elianna looking so relaxed and carefree, waving to her. My sister was very perplexed at what she had experienced, but later on she started to write a few stories which may possibly be made into a children's book about Elianna as a fairy, as the green floaty dress and barefooted vision of her inspired my sister to write.

The second vision came a few weeks later. She could vision Elianna in a beautiful, white, emboided gown, dressed in pink ballet shoes, dancing around with other girls and laughing in slow motion, her hair was longer and not as red and not as curly but it was her. She had her head tilted back showing her brilliant smile, her dress billowing up in slow motion as she was dancing.

In September 2013, Mandy had yet another vision of Elianna, she described almost every detail of this truly magnificent and beautiful vision. It was in the early morning as my sister was laying in bed. She was in a pretty relaxed state she said, when all of a sudden Elianna came into her mind. She was wading through very clear waters of a river. She was wearing a lovely green flimsy dress which my sister noticed was pretty wet, clinging to her bare legs, her hair lose, long and wavy, orangey-brown, flowing past her hips. The ends of her hair were also wet from the water. The vision was more from the side view and from behind and she did not see her face but my sister felt strongly that it was my daughter, Elianna, moving with ease and grace through the water. Since it was about 18 months since her

untimely passing, my sister said that Elianna now seemed to have more of a womanly figure with slightly broader hips and seemed slightly older, around 16. She appeared in human form. Her legs were bare as she waded out of the water to the banks, past the rocks in the water, the water was crystal clear, you could see right down to the white rocks below. In this vision my sister said as she looked up she could see the sky which was a beautiful blue. Elianna looked so beautiful, like a mermaid. Then the vision vanished.

Apparently, in the spirit world, our loved ones can appear any age they wish. However, most appear to us around the same age as they did when we last remembered them so we can recognize them.

The visions were simply amazing and uplifting. Elianna really seemed to be showing us mortals many things in dimensions you only read about... strangely, and yet comfortingly, she always seemed to be wearing her favorite colors in many of the signs she presented to us, which were green, blue and purple.

Chapter 22

Graduation

*The soul would have no rainbow
If the eye had no tears.*

-
Native American Nature Quotes

2013 would have been Elianna's last year at school if she had lived. Her class was preparing for their eighth grade graduation. My family and I had experienced many wonderful signs which we found were healing, however, the thought of graduation made Dan and I very sad. To be honest I didn't want to go and I felt this deep pain in my heart. Graduation is a rite of passage but I didn't even want to think about it right now; however we felt we were brave enough to attend, for the sake of our daughter, and we did. I feel sure Elianna would have wanted us to attend too. As I stated earlier, Dan and I are still her parents and she is still our daughter. We would never ever let her down.

A couple of girls who organized the graduation asked everybody to bring in pictures of their children. As I was looking through photo albums I found how my strength had been elevated compared to almost two years ago. I still felt sad thumbing through the photo albums but not the deep, painful sadness I felt in the beginning. I felt this heaviness had lifted slightly.

The principal filled me in on what was going to happen since we didn't really have too much contact with any of the students after Elianna passed. We were kind of out of the picture so it was nice to have some form of communication.

The day of graduation I was at home. I felt such a heaviness in my heart but I did pray and I asked God, his angels and of course Elianna to give us the strength we needed to help us through this difficult time. I remember shedding tears of sadness throughout the day and I must have prayed several times asking for strength and comfort.

As we arrived at the graduation ceremony, I felt that my prayers were answered and I felt this strong inner voice within me telling me *it's going to be ok*. Elianna's classmates were excitedly chatting. The girls looked very pretty and the boys were dressed very smartly. I couldn't believe how grown up they all were. I have to say it was very painful for me, that our wonderful daughter was not amongst the other classmates which were about to graduate. I felt the need to weep but I then found this wave of positive energy which elevated me into a plateau of a higher understanding and a calmness that suddenly instilled within me. I remember well, the green dress she wore when she played Lady Alisande in the school play. The color green always seemed to look lovely against her skin tone and hair. I could imagine her long beautiful red hair, flowing loosely down her back against the green dress. Oh, I so wished right now that my beloved daughter was part

of this celebration! But as I fought back the tears, I knew somehow that she was indeed part of this celebration, but in another dimension, a spiritual dimension.

I must admit it was difficult viewing the slide show. As the pictures appeared on the screen of Elianna, they would appear on screen a few seconds longer than the other pictures of her classmates. I did feel sad looking back at these precious years gone by, yet I had to remind myself of all the wonderful experiences we have had of Elianna and that she is indeed ok and I know she was probably amongst us all celebrating this special day.

During the ceremony, our family were presented with a beautiful vase of red roses. I remember what my sister told me about the most loveliest rose having the sharpest thorns. I know myself that the rose is symbolic to the soul so this gesture fitted beautifully. I smelled the lovely roses and as I inhaled the sweet perfume from them, I thought that despite it's thorns a rose is still supreme. It is the queen of all flowers.

After being presented with the roses, we sat down and when I looked up I noticed many, many people all over the entire gym including most of Elianna's classmates wiping away tears of sadness. This was a very touching moment for every single person in that room and something I will never forget.

As the students were all individually presented with their diplomas, the lights suddenly went out for about 10 seconds. Everybody in the room gasped. I then could hear laughter all around since this was not part of the graduation ceremony. I didn't think much about this and assumed somebody had accidentally hit the lights by mistake.

However, afterwards I did find out from a couple of the parents that nobody was even near the lights. I feel in my heart that it was Elianna, a part of her spirit-mischievous too! – wanting to be right there amongst us all. Well, she certainly got our attention that evening!

I spoke to a couple of the mothers, who are very spiritual, including Elianna's drama teacher, Mrs. Kofron. They commented on the energy present within the room and said they sensed strongly that Elianna was there with us; she was present in her own spiritual way, some kind of divine intervention.

The next day I was overwhelmed with great sadness from the evening before because part of me felt that the class had left Elianna behind and that life is passing by without her. I felt this heaviness in my heart and I just sat there and sobbed all day long. I felt this dark cloud hung over me once again, the same dark cloud I felt at the beginning of my grief.

I so desperately wanted to talk with my sister so I tried calling her but she wasn't home then decided to E-mail her and to tell her how very sad I felt and

just that I needed to hear words of comfort at that time. I knew somehow my sister would understand.

Several hours later Mandy E-mailed me back and tried to comfort me in her way and as she was doing so, Elianna came within her energy field, yet again. I was crying relentlessly and I so much wanted to hear from my own daughter. I was praying and hoping that she would comfort me. Elianna knows my pain and sadness, I know she does.

Elianna conveyed to her that the class did not leave her behind, a part of her is always going to be around her former classmates. She doesn't want me to be sad or upset. She understands the "hole in the middle" but she is sending spiritual vibes all the time to help cover the gap she left. She knows you will understand this. She says *Best Mom. The Boyds rule*, she is saying. Elianna is laughing and saying, *Daniel got a taste of the drama too then!* She also mentioned about Jessica wanting to write a letter to her, don't confuse her by telling her it's too complex, just leave it to her she will know what to write Elianna said. Writing a letter is the easiest thing in the world and will get certain things off Jessica's chest. She is looking forward to seeing the letter that Jessica will write. Please be open and transparent, be sad but not too sad, talk about Elianna by all means, she is saying and remember the dreams and the signs.

She tells her friends to be good at school, she wishes she could grow up with them, but is doing so in another sense, spiritually. Elianna then told my sister

that she has not left you, she is where you are and everywhere you go. A part of her energy goes with you and that she is only in another place.

Once again, through these relentless tears I could not stop reading the words that Elianna had conveyed to my sister. I prayed and spoke to Elianna and thanked her for communicating to Mandy. I couldn't thank her enough. Elianna sensed I needed to hear from her. What our family had experienced the day before was very difficult and this would have been a huge turning point in Elianna's life, like I had mentioned earlier, a rite of passage, so to speak. I believe she knew this and that we would be sad and this is why I believe she came to Mandy.

Several days later, Mandy was walking in the nearby forest. She often walks in the forest because she feels a sense of tranquility and peace. The forest is beautiful. I once went with her when I went over to Germany several years back and brought Elianna with me when she was a young girl. The forest is like being in another world. You sense such a peace and enlightenment. My sister once told me that the forest has a certain spiritual energy to it.

As she was walking along she was thinking very hard of Elianna when all of a sudden Elianna came in her mind's eye. She was apparently standing alongside my grandmother, yet again. Elianna was standing by her waving, appearing in a white dress. She was smiling broadly and proudly showing my

sister a huge silver star in her left hand. Strangely enough this was shortly after her classmates had graduated. Was this some kind of heavenly graduation that Elianna experienced? Who knows, but it was very real to my sister and I was comforted when she told me about this. It is nice to believe this, and it fits. For who can prove otherwise?

Chapter 23

A Letter to Heaven

Tears are words which need to be written.

-
Paulo Coelho

In July, shortly after the graduation, Jessica decided to write a personal letter to her dear sister in heaven. I believe she wanted to do this but in her own little mind probably she thought it was strange since Elianna was not around to actually, physically read the letter but our loved ones are always with us as Elianna did convey by thought to my sister on a couple of occasions.

After Jessica wrote the letter she then went into her bedroom and read the letter quietly to Elianna. I told Jessica that Elianna will receive the letter in her own special way and that she knows exactly what is going on and if she were here today she would be very proud of her little sister. Jessica did tell me that she wanted Elianna to come to her so she could see her and this was something she did write in the letter. I was quite surprised Jessica telling me this because I remember when I had asked her almost two years ago if she had heard Elianna playing the trumpet she hid her head under the covers. Maybe she misses her more than I think and that she would really love to see her again.

Jessica and I were sat in the sunroom one summer evening. The sunroom is a place where I feel content. It has a reassuring peace I can connect to, a comforting peace where I feel I am able to connect to my soul. I also feel a connection to my daughter because I am surrounded by nature. I take a great interest watching birds build their nests showing me that life does live on and that life is just a continuous cycle. There is beauty out there for us to see if we open our eyes. I have learned to not take life for granted and to appreciate the simpler things in life.

As Jessica and I were sat looking at a magazine, from the corner of my eye I sensed her looking away. Then she grabbed on to me and nuzzled her face in my chest. I then said, "Jessica, what's wrong, are you ok?"

She held tightly onto me for a few moments, looked towards the dining room and then turned back to me and said, "I just saw Elianna."

I felt an excitement deep within and asked her what she actually saw. Jessica was trying to make sense of this within her own little mind and told me that she didn't want to talk about it at that moment. It was probably a shock for her and that she did not expect to see Elianna's spirit out of the blue.

The next morning I asked Jessica again what she saw and this time she was more open and transparent towards me and she was willing to share what she

had seen. She started to explain to me that something from the side caught her eye and when she looked up she saw the side view of Elianna as she glided from one part of the room to the other. She appeared in a bluish/purplish dress. The dress appeared to be ankle length but Jessica told me she could not see her feet at all. Elianna's arms were by her side and her hair long and loose.

I truly believed Jessica and I felt an excitement within me knowing that our daughter is still with us after all this time, giving us signs of encouragement which in turn gives our family the strength to go forward as we continue with our long journey of grief. She is teaching us that life does go on in a spiritual sense and that she is forever with us.

It must have taken a lot of energy for Elianna to appear in physical form. Although we have experienced many signs from Elianna I am still amazed at this one because none of us have actually seen her physically, only in dreams and visions. Jessica then turned to me and said something very important which I totally had forgotten about, she said, "Remember when I wrote the letter to Elianna asking her if I could see her again?"

I gasped in amazement. "Oh my goodness, that's right," I replied.

I truly believe that this was a special sign just for Jessica like the time when Elianna played the trumpet for Dan and I. We had been blessed to

experienced so many different signs from our daughter as she is continually helping us from the other side.

Chapter 24

"MOM"

Spiritual enlightenment must come little by little, otherwise it will overwhelm.

-
Idries Shah

I had another personal experience myself back in 2013. On August 11, the two year anniversary of Elianna's death, I had sent a tribute out in the early morning to many of our friends in honor of her. I like to pass on my spiritual knowledge to people so I can enlighten and inspire them since I have learned so very much in such a short time. As all this spiritual insight has helped me and I am hoping that this will in turn help others and that many will remember some of the things mentioned in my book.

Dan took the kids out to visit a good friend of ours that day and I decided to stay home. I felt a little sad, obviously thinking about Elianna so I decided to go into the sunroom and sit quietly. After some time I started to doze off when all of a sudden I heard one word "mom." I know it was Elianna. She shouted - Mom! to me. I remember the excitement in her voice just hearing that one precious word. She was excited because she was able to reach me. This one word did not come from within the room but it was a thought wave she was sending to me, communicating to me from her

world to mine. She sounded like she was in an empty room because her voice sounded echoey but this is because of her being in a different dimension I believe. She was able to communicate to me because my mind was in a relaxed state. I wish she had carried on talking to me but hearing this one word comforted me deeply and knowing that Elianna still knows me as *mom* was the best feeling ever. This experience was so amazing also knowing that on this day, August 11th, was Elianna's 2nd anniversary in heaven. She has helped build up my spritual wisdom and strength from her world. I sensed I was slowly healing at long last and gradually coming out of my state of grief. I felt like I am slowly coming through the Valley of Tears and that I am reaching the other side where the grass is a little greener.

A Mother's Loss
By Amanda Jane Penny

It was 2 years ago today
When the angels descended and led you away
The sun was hot in the August sky
Yet I was left with my grief, to wonder why
Why were you taken so very young
When your life had only just begun
But in time I realized Jesus had other plans
As you were touched by angels' hands
He was missing an angel he said
As he tenderly touched your auburn head
And so it came to be
That although you are not here
You're still close to me
With wisdom and spiritual eyes I see
That you are learning in heaven every day
Sending signs to us along your way
2 years on today
How much I've grown within, I'd say!
I hold your memory in my heart
And know we'll never be apart
You are only a thought away
As I look at your picture and pray
I miss you dearly, And the pain is still deep
As you appear sometimes when I sleep
I may have walked through the valley of tears
But your passing gave me courage beyond my years
And it comforts me you are not alone
For you are happy in your spiritual home
Your soul is at peace, And free from pain
Rejoicing when we will meet again!

Chapter 25

The Soul Never Dies

When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at begin to change.

-
Wayne Dyer

The last two spiritual experiences I had were two wonderfully, amazing dreams I had experienced in my dreamstate. When I woke up in my dream, I found myself laying in a hospital bed alone in the room. The room was very bright and I remember feeling very peaceful. I knew I was going to see Elianna very soon and I remember feeling very excited. I had this feeling that I was going to die and I had accepted this, it was a real feeling and I was absolutely ok with it. I knew as soon as I closed my eyes I would leave my body. I remember gently closing my eyes and then I suddenly felt my spirit rush downwards towards my feet and then out of my body leaving my body behind. This was so amazing because I knew I was still part of that huge surge of energy and consciousness. In this heavenly state, I felt such peace and calmness surrounding me, I had no fears at all.

I remember in this dream looking back at my body, and actually recognizing myself, yet this body was no longer me as I was part of this other surreal consciousness which lasted for a few seconds. I then felt myself – in the form of a massive ball of energy

rising up towards the ceiling. I remember looking down, fascinated expecting to see myself lying on the hospital bed, except strangely I do not recall that my body was in fact lying on the bed. I was conscious throughout this wonderful experience, and I remember then I was in my earthly body so I was still in my conscious mind, so to speak. After some time I then must have woken up, and as I did so, I remember waking up feeling tingly all over, as if the energy that had departed from my body had suddenly returned to me, in my waking state. This tingly feeling remained for a long time, after I had woken up. I lay there in bed knowing I had experienced something very intense and almost magical.

I am not sure if Elianna had sent this dream to me to experience how she felt when her spirit and soul left her body. I just knew that prior to closing my eyes in the dream, I felt ok about actually dying. I was unafraid and knew that I had accepted this fact due to the calmness within my soul. I am not afraid to look death and dying in the face, which I know takes a lot of courage and only through Elianna's passing I have gained a huge amount of spiritual wisdom and insight which continues to grow every day.

My second dream experience was seeing Elianna in her casket, dressed in a lovely purple outfit, purple being her favorite color. I remember in the dream that my husband and my two children were present also, and as we were viewing Elianna from a

distance, I happened to see her spirit literally transcend out of her physical body and she suddenly walked away with ease! In my dream I knew that I was the only person to have witnessed this happening, and that somehow it was meant to be that I, as Elianna's mother, should have this experience. I then sensed a freedom and lightness to Elianna's spirit body since she was now no longer in her physical body. Then I woke up, feeling comforted and transformed at the same time.

Once again, I strongly believe that my daughter is sending me dreams like this, to help and comfort me; in some way they also seem to be giving me further knowledge or insight from another realm that her soul indeed lives on and that she will be with us forever, for the soul never dies.

Chapter 26

Elianna and Cookies

Anyone who has lost a loved one knows that you don't recover. Instead, you learn to incorporate their absence and memories into your life and channel your emotional energy towards others, eventually, your grief will walk beside you instead of consuming you.

-
Rashida Rowe

To continue life in Elianna's name I was thinking about possibly holding some kind of small grief group at the school where I would reach out to students from surrounding neighborhoods who have lost someone very close to them. I really didn't want to invest too much time talking about grief because it is a very difficult to process for many adolescents and teenagers as well as adults. Since I am not a certified grief counselor I would have to depend on other professionals who know about counseling. I have taken classes on counseling at my local college but there are certain restrictions I would have to abide by and I don't yet have the credentials for this type of work.

I wanted the work of a grief group to be light-hearted in a way, certainly not too heavy, as grief and loss are heavy enough for anyone to deal with. I then started to think of something Elianna enjoyed in life which would be fitting to the grief group. There were many activities she enjoyed in her life

such as drama, fishing, crafts, baking cookies etc. Since I had a difficult time deciding, I E-mailed Mandy and asked her. We began to E-mail one another back and forth and suddenly my sister said she started feeling Elianna once again communicating with her. I felt such a wonderful surge of energy rush through me. Again I was just amazed and comforted knowing Elianna had come to her. She told me she could feel Elianna's zest and enthusiasm coming through and amazingly, that Elianna was wanting this!! Something to celebrate her is so much nicer than talking about how to handle grief because children really don't want to hear this because it's too deep Elianna conveyed. She also communicated to my sister that life is too short to be grieving and feeling heavy.

Every child who lost someone should partake in something like this. My sister Mandy said she got the feeling that my daughter Elianna senses that I am a comforting rock in the family and that is good. Then Elianna seemed to be conveying to Mandy that anything connected to grief has to be *cool* and that the kids need therapy to be fun, joyful and colorful, which is an expression of life rather than death. This would make grieving kids happy. My sister said Elianna conveyed to her that I as her mom wanted to remember her to others in a joyful manner, and the only way to do it is through baking cookies. Baking cookies is a joint thing - grieving kids decorating the cookies together – and it fits that Elianna would also have regarded this to be very satisfying, therapeutic, and fun. Elianna seemed to

sense through Mandy that I wished to do this in her honor, and that this should be done at her old school which holds many happy memories for her. Every child loves a cookie! I feel Elianna knows this well and what better way to express and deal with the darker aspects of grief than baking and decorating.

Chapter 27

Apparitions

*Opportunities to find deeper powers within ourselves come
when life seems most challenging.*

Joseph Campbell

Recently, I was talking with Daniel telling him about my book. I told him the book was almost complete and that I wanted to know if he had maybe encountered any more dreams or signs from his dear sister, Elianna.

At the back of my mind, I was pretty sure that he hadn't otherwise he would have told me so already, since he knows that I loved hearing about all of our enlightening experiences our family have witnessed or felt from her.

So, I was understandably quite shocked when Daniel suddenly turned to me and said, "Yes, mom, I saw her 2 times in the last 2 weeks."

I was a little surprised and said "You mean to tell me she came to you as Elianna like she did with Jessica?" I asked him why he never mentioned something so important to me, but Daniel told me he had forgotten to. I asked him how he could forget something like this? Daniel did not reply right away, and then I thought about it for a few

seconds more and I said, "Is it because you didn't think I would believe you?"

He nodded. I then reassured Daniel that I would always believe him. I do know that he is very sensitive and has witnessed many signs, energies and visions since Elianna's passing. Our whole family have witnessed so much since Elianna's passing that this would be hard not to believe because I know she is always with us and is helping us from the other side. I then asked Daniel to explain what he had seen. He told me that Elianna had appeared to him when he was alone in the house. He said he was sitting in the living room and she very briefly appeared in front of him and then disappeared rather quickly. He said he could not see from the waist down but he knew it was most definitely his sister. He told me she was wearing a white dress and a white hat decorated with very colorful flowers. He told me he then became afraid and soon after seeing Elianna he called his dad to ask him when he would be coming home. I think Daniel did not like to be alone in the house. I talked about this to my husband, Dan afterwards and he said he remembered the day when Daniel called him. He was in fact on his way home and he admitted that our son Daniel had sounded a little afraid on the phone but he did not know why Daniel had never said anything to him.

The second apparition was when Daniel was alone in his bedroom several days later. It was about midnight and Elianna appeared again. According to Daniel she was wearing the same outfit, a white long

sleeved dress with a flowered hat. This time Daniel said he could see the whole dress but was unable to see her feet. He said she appeared in the mirror very briefly and then disappeared. She was smiling at him this time. Since he saw her at night time he was more afraid. I think anybody would be afraid to suddenly see an apparition appearing in front of them no matter who it was. I asked Daniel why he had not come into our bedroom if he had been afraid but he told me that he didn't want to wake us!

I told Daniel that maybe he is also sensitive to spirit especially seeing Elianna in physical form on two occasions, and having many other experiences. I reassured him again and told him not to be afraid because even though his sister has found peace and light in her new dimension, she still probably feels the need to comfort him in some small way, given that her untimely passing was very quick and tragic. I believe also that my daughter, Elianna is still strongly connected to both siblings Daniel and Jessica, and also to her former home. I told Daniel again that Elianna probably returned to see him, to possibly comfort him even- certainly NOT to harm him! I think Daniel then understood and even for a young boy, he seemed to realise there is far more between heaven and earth than we mortals can comprehend.

I am not sure if what we have experienced as a family is common in the form of visions, smells, apparitions, signs and thought waves but these wonderful signs have been ongoing, ever since

Elianna's tragic passing. All these signs, continually help us to deal with her loss. However, since these amazing signs, I do believe that Elianna is not lost, her spirit lives on and is helping us profoundly with our grief.

Chapter 28

Spiritual Afterthoughts

Quiet the mind and the soul will speak.

-
Otto Rank

As I began healing within, I sensed my grief slowly shifting and I knew that I had found the most important teacher and guide within me which is my soul, that inner voice. The purpose is to rely on our soul because our soul never lets us down and deep within we always find the answers if we listen to that inner voice. My soul has helped elevate my level of understanding and through this has taught me to look at life through a different dimension.

We must nurture our soul because it is the only part of us we take to the afterlife. I have learned to nurture my soul because this gives me an inner peace.

We are often pulled into different directions and it is important we stay focused and centered. The center of our being is our soul and that it has the power and the answers. It's good to be true to ourselves and to listen to our feelings. The soul is the only thing which matters. Many people don't recognize their soul because it is hidden or suppressed and when you go through life with no soul connection, you feel like a robot. We have to have some kind of inner flame that makes the connection with our soul

because the soul is true to who we are and will never let us down. In fact, it is never good to be separated from the soul, we then experience a kind of "inner death" so for me it is tremendously important to remain connected and look at it as a guide and loving teacher. I never felt this as strongly as I do now. Elianna has changed my outlook on life and has changed me as a person as I have become more centered within.

It is important to be thankful for what we have. We are all individuals with different soul traits and personalities and it is very important to accept ourselves because we are all unique and special in our own way.

Elianna taught us about life and through her passing she is helping us fulfill our path here on earth. I have learned to re-value my life since her tragic and untimely passing and I sense clearly that she is helping and guiding us from the otherside, from another peaceful dimension.

None of us are invincible and any one of us can die at any given time, therefore, it is important to live in the present, and try always to live life to its greatest potential.

As many of you know, life is very short and every day which passes us by I like to think that this is one step closer to going home so we can be re-united with our loved ones again. Until then, we are

learning here and our loved ones are learning on the other side.

I feel a deep sadness within me now as I am nearing the end of my book. As I am writing this I feel tears rolling down my cheeks. This journey has been painful but also healing within. As I was writing the book I felt that spiritually I was being guided. I thought long and hard about writing this book however, I was very undecided in the beginning as I had so many emotions instilled within and so many experiences to share but I felt that uncertainty of going ahead. I have never written a book before and I was not sure I had the confidence to do that. Where would I start with my story and how do I begin. How will it sound? How painful would it be for me to relive the past and to feel all the heartache and terrible loss once again? It has only been 2 years and 8 months and Elianna's death is still fresh to our family. However, as each day went by, my inner voice began to get stronger and stronger, and it assured me that I must write this book, for myself, and for my dear daughter Elianna. I had to write it all down, the long journey of my family to the rainbow's edge where tears sometimes became smiles. It was at this moment when I realised a great resilience and strength within me and it was then when all of my doubts started to fade.

The passing of Elianna is still fresh but because I trusted my inner voice, I had the strength to write my story. Finally, on that one cold day in November 2013 I decided to listen to that true inner voice

which some of us might call the soul and it was then when I started to write my journey.

Since that day the words just rushed out, starting to overspill on paper and I could not get all my emotions and feelings, out fast enough - despite my devastated heart. Everything just seemed to flow, including my own tears, but still I felt a sense of relief. I knew it was the right thing to do and that writing this book would be the most important journey I had to take. A journey of grief but of lighthearted bitterseet moments too, and for me there was no turning back.

I have since felt a strong connectedness to my home. I feel a peace and a solitude because I feel a closeness to Elianna which in turn gives me the feeling of contentment and peace within, after all, this was her home for those 12 precious years and in a way it still is. I deeply believe that Elianna has helped guide me while writing my book because on several occasions I have sensed a blanket of energy around me, a comforting energy.

Many of us often fear how we die not necessarily fearing the notion of death itself. Looking back at the day when Elianna collapsed at home, I believe deep in my soul she *knew* this was her last moment, unfortunately but mercifully she wasn't in too much pain. I am so grateful I was able to hold her hand and that we were all there, as her family to the very end.

I also know that she wanted us all there when she passed at the hospital that day. It wasn't meant for me to leave. She wanted us altogether as a family when her spirit departed.

Please know that there is no end to life because our soul lives on. Our loved ones are always with us and part of them are around us all the time like Elianna has shown my family and I. One day we will see our loved ones again when we return back to our spiritual home. We are apart only temporarily in different dimensions. We are here living and learning and our loved ones are learning spiritually in the afterlife and one day when we pass we will all be reunited once again, to exchange love and blessings, in a telepathic way.

It was very important for me to share my story because many people wonder what parents go through and how they cope when they lose a child. I understand very well that every parent goes through grief differently but I do know that there are certain parts of my grief which I have shared in my book which many grieving parents will be able to relate to. I want you all to know that we are never alone and we have God and his angels around us all the time as well as loved ones sending us vibes of energy.

I believe that nothing changes in death as Elianna is still the older sister to both Daniel and Jessica and she is still our daughter, but in spirit form.

Grief will always continue and it never truly stops. It will get better but grief will always accompany us,

in one way or another .but it's important that we embrace the grief as you would a close friend, because another aspect of our grief is love. As long as you grieve you can remember the good times and you can laugh even through your tears. This is a wonderful, bittersweet thing. Many aspects of our grief contain all the happy memories we had of Elianna and these memories will never, ever fade. It is good to go into the pain and stick it out as long as you can and to not deny the pain, knowing that later the pain will not *throw you* and that you will ultimately survive.

Since Elianna fell tragically ill on August 8th, the day of our wedding anniversary, this particular day to Dan and I will always be tinged with sadness. I know we are brave and strong and that Elianna is around us in spirit which has given us hope and reassurance that the soul lives on which is nurturing. I feel I have reached a special place within me where I know that life is limited and that deep within there is this place which gives me the strength and the grace to understand so many spiritual truths.

Of course there are still days when we cry and we wish our daughter was still around us physically. My husband Dan is still grieving of course but I have noticed a small change in him because he has become stronger lately. All we can do is to take baby steps. Elianna has made our journey enlightening showing us so many amazing things which in turn has helped us grow spiritually. And knowing that our daughter and many of our loved

ones are with us. We just have to be open loving and transparent.

For every ending there is a beginning and that is the good news, for I truly believe when you lose a child, a spiritual awakening occurs within, which was definite in my case.

Epilogue

During the past 2 years and 8 months I have found a new spiritual understanding in the depths of my grief. The spiritual understanding is deep within my soul and started out as a small tender flower and with nurturing and understanding it has now grown to become a beautiful rose. Of course, our family feels the pain of those thorns sometimes, that are very sharp and can still make us weep, but my sister once told me that the most beautiful roses have the most thorns. And there is no such thing as a rose without thorns. The "rose" in my soul will always be there deep within me to remind me of my pain of losing our beautiful red-haired daughter. Elianna may have departed from our world, physically, but I know in my heart and mind that her spirit is alive and vibrant in the next.

SLEEPING BEAUTY

are you alright?
What do you lay your head on at night?
Do the angels give you a pillow
To rest your head
As you make your way to your heavenly bed?
And tell me, Elianna
Is it made from clouds?
For angels' pillows are soft and white
So comforting in the darkest night!
And isn't your home near Starlight Way?
That's bright and cheery, night and day?
It's just one step behind Dreamland
So easy to find
That heavenly place with you in mind
Where all the children have sleepovers there
Yes, right next to the stars
Just behind the planets of Venus and Mars!
Sleeping beauty
You left us too soon
Guess who told me that?
The Man in the Moon!
He was sad about that
And didn't want you to cry
As he asked you to join him
In the midnight sky
When all the children are tucked up in bed
Elianna shall play
I heard him say
He lets you swing on the stars at night
And you are having such fun til the morning light!

He told me that you are free from pain
And suddenly I am able to smile again
For you're in a place of peace and light
So, dear Man in the Moon
Please tell Elianna goodnight
Tell the angels to protect her and treat her just right
May her tender spirit flourish and grow
And tell Elianna we love her and miss her so!
And although my heart may feel like a stone
I'm comforted that you are not alone
For at least you have found your heavenly home
I close my eyes, yes, Starlight Way!
A heavenly place
Just a heartbeat away.

Written by Amanda Jane Penny

From Elianna's aunt, Amanda Jane Penny

In the first stages of my grief, I would walk a lot in the forest, in the cemetery. Sometimes I'd sit quietly on a bench in the cemetery, with the late afternoon sun warming my face, not speaking, my eyes closed. Often though you could find me talking to the trees in the forest though - elm, oak and sycamore trees all standing together in companionable silence - with tears streaming down my face. I would ask these trees to give me strength and comfort. I would sometimes embrace an oak tree and feel its rough bark, see its gnarled branches, and marvel how firmly its roots were embedded in the ground. I would even feel quite safe for a while. Like the tree, my boughs too bent but would not break. In moments like this I would try to make sense of Elianna's passing, which really held no sense at all for me at first. If this made no sense to me, how on earth could my sister Louise have made sense out of her daughter's untimely passing? As I sat in the quietness of the cemetery, this thought would go through my head many times.

Elianna was my niece and the first-born child of my sister Louise. Elianna was still so young! Beautiful and slender, like a graceful deer. She was just starting to emerge into a butterfly - I could almost see her tiny patterned wings, ready to take flight - and then I was forced to remember the bitter

truth. Then of course, sitting at the foot of the old oak tree, I had to hold my head in my hands, blocking out the warm rays of the autumn sun for the moment.

Suddenly the wind stirred the branches of the oak tree and it was precisely at that moment that a leaf slowly floated down that day and landed literally at my feet. I was suddenly aware of a peaceful silence all around. I looked up to the Heavens in wonderment. Birds and squirrels were watching me intently. The leaf was the exact color of Elianna's glorious red hair. It must be a sign I told myself! I picked up the leaf tenderly, marveling at the colors!

I treasured the leaf; I remember it gave me a momentary sense of comfort.

It was always the little things at the beginning that comforted me in my grief the most: a song, a hug without words, seeing or hearing a baby laugh, and of course autumn leaves, with their wonderful red, orange and golden hues. I just know that Elianna is probably sitting way up, on the highest branch of the tallest tree, painstakingly painting all these leaves in the loveliest autumn colors before she gently shakes the branches and lets them fall. This is her gift to us. She sits barefoot, close to nature, on the highest branch, with her palette of autumn

colors: green, red, orange, terracotta and gold. She is dressed in a lovely flimsy green dress which shimmers in the afternoon sunlight. Her hair is long and loose, cascading all around her shoulders and down her back in red ripples. Elianna is a tree fairy! How come I never noticed this before? She laughs at my confusion, a sound like water running over stones in a clear stream. I tell her this and she just laughs again, a lovely sound! She loves to paint, it is a creative and most relaxing hobby she is telling me. Each leaf is individually painted, she says, and each leaf is beautiful in its own special way.

This sounds beautiful and is something I just know Elianna would love to do: painting autumn leaves for us, giving each of us a small but colorful piece of Nature to help us in our grief. To comfort us and to remind us that Nature is all around us.

We may have lost Elianna as a mortal here on earth, but we have gained instead a beautiful and bright Tree Fairy, who springs from branch to branch, and is always close to Nature.

When the trees are blossoming in spring, Elianna is there, marveling at the tiny pink buds and start of a new life. When it is summer, you will find Elianna, the Tree Fairy, up on high, asleep in the shade; curled up on a huge green leaf. Her dreams are

colorful and peaceful. I know they must be, as she has a smile on her lips.

When autumn leaves are falling, Elianna is at her busiest, painting beautiful leaves for us, to comfort us in our grief.

In midwinter the trees are bare and the landscape is white with snow; I enjoy the solitude then suddenly I hear someone laughing and I know it can only be Elianna, as I see her chasing squirrels playfully, running nimbly up and down the branches, in her lovely green dress, with snowflakes in her lovely red hair!

So you see - Elianna is never really far away from us. Being a Tree Fairy has many magic moments. You only have to *believe*!

The power of thought is almost without boundaries. as nobody can prove otherwise, can they?

The Tree Fairy and the Snowman

Written especially for Elianna

By

Amanda Jane Penny

It was a brisk winter's day; blustery and cold, snow lay thick on the ground. All the trees were bare and a pale yellow sun peeped out weakly from a grey overcast sky.

I was dressed warmly for the weather and pulled my knitted cap further down my brow, walking a little faster now, as I noticed it had begun to snow again, fresh white snowflakes touching my face.

Suddenly there was a huge blast of icy wind that seemed to envelop me, I could not move for a couple of seconds, I was aware of a cold and swirling sensation around me and I closed my eyes, waiting for this spinning sensation to pass. The cold swirling of snowflakes stopped abruptly and as I opened my eyes again I saw the beautiful Tree Fairy standing in front of me: she was wearing a lovely white velvet cloak and hood, which could not disguise that flame-red hair I had come to recognise and love so much. My heart danced in glee. "Elianna, is that you?" I asked. "Yes of course it is me" she answered, laughing gaily, as she floated

around me. "Am I dreaming?" I asked her. "Life is one long dream" she only answered, bending down now to form a snowball with her bare hands. I saw thousands of snowflakes dotted like diamonds all over her hair. Such a lovely vision, in mid-winter too, and how come she is not cold I wondered. Bare feet and hands?

As if she sensed what I was thinking in that moment, the Tree Fairy laughed again at my confusion and said that only we mortals feel the cold; then she threw the snowball playfully in my direction. I laughed too, and soon we were both giggling like children, running round, breathless, throwing snowballs at each other and having such a fun time.

Elianna's cheeks were rosy-red like fresh apples, I noticed, and her eyes were as clear as green glass. I felt happy - even joyous - with her at my side. Rolling around in the snow with her, I felt like I was in another world where paying bills and going to work just did not matter anymore. I was suddenly much more interested in snowball fights.

Just as I was about to ask her which world she did come from, the Tree Fairy tilted her head to one side like an inquisitive blackbird and said to me "come on - let's build a snowman!"

"Good idea!" I replied, and we set about the task straightaway, rolling and packing huge amounts of snow firmly into place until we had modelled the snowman's body, and then his head. It was such hard work but so enjoyable, the time just seemed to fly by, as we laughed, and worked together with the snow, until a tall and respectable looking snowman was finally created. The Tree Fairy quickly managed to find stones which would be his eyes, and even a carrot for a nose and an old discarded cap for his head! I don't know where she found these items in this barren winter landscape but she did. Fairies have magical qualities so it is easy for them, I figured. Meanwhile I found some brittle twigs that I fashioned together to form a pipe for his mouth. We then stood back to admire our newly-built snowman and laughed and laughed, dancing around him in circles and jumping for joy.

After a while we sat down together on the snow, slightly out of breath; the snow was still falling gently but I no longer noticed the cold; the skies were grey and the watery sun had long disappeared behind the clouds. No words were spoken to break the magical atmosphere. I felt I could stay here forever, with my lovely Tree Fairy. What an awesome day this was! Then the Tree Fairy looked heavenward and said slowly "oh I have to go, its time " She pulled up her white hooded cape around

her. I don't know what she meant and why she had to leave so suddenly. I tried to embrace her but there was only thin air and the damp feeling on my bare hands of snowflakes. I turned just in time to see a lovely white velvet cape floating upwards on the wintry horizon. I rubbed my eyes - I did not know if I was dreaming or not, but wait - did not Elianna tell me, laughingly, that life is one long dream? Where is the line between dreaming and reality? Maybe there is no line; it is all one dimension after all.

I stood up slowly and adjusted my cap. As I went past our snowman, I thought I saw him wink at me. I rubbed my eyes again - could that be? I retraced my steps and smiled at the snowman that the Tree Fairy and I had so proudly built. The wintry air was cold and still, the swirling sensation of snow had gone. I pricked up my ears and thought I heard a faint laugh in the far distance but I may have been mistaken. Then a snowball landed suddenly at my feet. I smiled and looked heavenward, before picking it up - "thanks, Tree Fairy!" I said laughing. I mean, who else but Elianna could have thrown a snowball?

I turned back one last time and well, it might have been the snowflakes in my eyes but I truly believe I saw our Snowman smile back at me too.

It's amazing, all these things that Tree Fairies can do, isn't it? They're such beautiful and playful sweet creatures.

In winter all you need to do is like building snowmen. That's not much to ask, is it? Then anything can happen - when you believe it will. Tree Fairies like Elianna can make *anything* come true.

AUTHOR'S BIOS

After attending college to complete a language for business course in England, Amanda Jane Penny went to live in Germany where she now resides and works as a bilingual secretary and translator.

Amanda has always been passionately interested in writing short stories and poems, in German as well as English. She is fluent in German and French and has a good knowledge of Spanish. You can contact Amanda Penny at miss.desmond@gmx.de.

After staying home to care for her children for ten years, Louise Boyd decided to return to school to pursue a degree in Human Services. It was the right decision to make and rewarding for her.

After the sad passing of her daughter, Louise became a volunteer for hospice. Through her own grief management, she has successfully reached others which is fulfilling for her. She has written several articles for magazines on the theme of grief and having a loved one die. She resides in Wisconsin with her husband Dan, 2 children, and their 3 loveable dogs. You can contact Louise Boyd at louisesuzanneboyd@gmail.com.