

Susan Kathleen Ward was born on December 18, 1959. She was the second of four children and the first daughter born to Tom and Frances Ward. She was my only sister, and I miss her. Susie passed away on September 1, 2017. She was sitting up on her couch, watching television. My guess is her heart just stopped beating, and that is how her grandson found her.

I was asleep when I received the phone call from the EMT driver. I knew immediately what had happened before he said a word. Susie hadn't been feeling well for quite some time, and I could see her growing tired over the recent months. She and I rode the bus into work together every weekday, and she was experiencing a lot of different health issues. So much so, that she was starting to get on my nerves. That's what sisters do.

We were together for the last time on a Wednesday, for my grandson, Alec's birthday at Chuck E. Cheese. She was tired and ended up calling out of work the next two days, then died Friday evening. Like me, Susie was raising her two grandchildren. We had that in common – both of us with daughters who made poor choices, and we were left to pick up the pieces.

When we arrived at her house that night, I walked in the front door and to my surprise, she was still on the couch sitting up. You would have thought she was just asleep, except for the spittle that was dangling from the top lip of her open mouth, from when the medical team tried to resuscitate her. Her grandkids were back in the bedroom being consoled by one of the team members.

They laid Susie on the gurney and were starting to roll her out of the house when I asked them to wait. I just looked over her, tried to straighten her hair around her face. I brushed her cheek with the back of my hand and said my goodbye to her. I told them they could take her away.

As I write these words, my heart aches and my eyes sting a bit when I think about that day. I don't think Susie suffered any pain because her face was peaceful. But I know that isn't how she would like to be remembered. She had a hard life, but to be honest, much of the strife and grief she experienced were the result of her own choices. Like me, she experienced a lot of junk growing up, and her adult life wasn't easy, but I think we all can say that, can't we?

But my purpose for today's thoughts is to remember those things about my sister that I loved. This December 18, Susie would have been sixty-two years old. Goodness. Susie and I had some fun times together. We had a lot of fights too, but I remember the fun for the most part.

We always had to share a room and sometimes a bed. Unfortunately for her, I was a bed wetter when I was very young. In my sleep, I would roll over to Susie's side, pee, then roll back over to the dry side! She would wake up soaking wet. I know I didn't do it deliberately, but I did think it was funny. I'm sure she was the happiest when I finally grew out of that stage, or when we got twin beds.

I'm sure I was a pesky little sister at times. Especially when Susie was a teenager. She put up with my Donny posters all over the room. She had her little crushes too, and a few posters, but she let mine dominate the décor. I can remember our singing to records as we performed in front of the dresser mirror. Susie used to write her name on everything she owned. Hairbrushes, notebooks, records or eight track tapes. Everything! I never understood why she did that. But I smile when I think of it.

She loved the Beach Boys. I believe we saw them together in concert at least five times. We would sit in our room for hours listening to records. Sometimes we'd listen to hers, sometimes mine. Susie was my best friend growing up. Like I said, we had our differences as all sisters do, but we were very close. We endured a lot of pain together as we watched our parent's marriage demise. Eventually she joined the Air Force, right out of high school. I'm sure it was to escape from our home.

I prefer to fast forward to after we moved here to Tennessee. Susie followed and pretty much remained wherever we were. That was both good and bad. We hadn't been in Tennessee a whole year when September 11, 2001 occurred. She was on a Greyhound bus on her way to Tennessee when that horrible day happened. Her bus was delayed somewhere in Utah I believe, but she was finally able to make it to Tennessee.

After the war in Iraq had begun, Susie had the opportunity to work for a contractor in Iraq and was stationed in Mosul. There were many stories from her time there, but what I was most grateful for were the trips my she provided for the two of us to share.

Our first trip was to London and Paris right before Christmas. I know I would have never had the opportunity to go on trips like this if it hadn't been for the generosity of my sister. The first half of the trip we enjoyed the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace and crossing the famous crosswalk on Abbey Road, where the Beatles recording studio had been. In Paris we walked along the Champs-Elysees, saw the Louvre, and were shown the tunnel where Princess Diana had died.

In 2005, as a sort of birthday present for me, we enjoyed a second trip to Europe, only this time we spent the entire week in Rome. Together we saw the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, the Colosseum, and the Trevi Fountain. Oh, we had the best times together on these trips. One day while we were enjoying our gelato outside, a very handsome man walked by and joking with Susie, I said, "I wouldn't mind seeing that guy in a toga!" From that point on, if we passed anyone remotely handsome, together under our breath we would say, "To-ga!" We laughed so much on this trip.

Susie wanted to bring me to Ireland as well, but I had to say no. I didn't feel like it was fair to leave my husband alone with the kids and take another dream trip like those we had already enjoyed together. I knew I would make it to Ireland one day, and I have. But Europe will always make me think of Susie, and the memories we created there.

I recall these days with my sister every time her birthday rolls around. She hated that her birthday was a week before Christmas. Sometimes her birthday gifts were suspiciously wrapped in Christmas paper. After both of our parents were gone, Susie was divorced and her daughter was not concerned about her mother, or her mother's birthday. I tried to make her birthdays special during the last years of her life. I was in a better position to do more for her, as she had done for me years earlier.

Thanks for letting me share a little bit about my only sister. She was a generous person. Too generous. She didn't really know how to show affection, or to receive it, but she showed her love for others by giving them gifts. She and I could talk about anything, and we could laugh about anything as well. I really miss her sometimes.

Anyway, Happy Birthday Susie! I know I'll see you again someday. I have a lot more I'd like to say to you, but I'll do that when I see you, if that's okay. Thank you for being my big sister, and my best friend.

