

This week, I will be on my way to say my final farewell to my brother, Mike. Following the death of our parents and then losing our sister, Susie, in September 2017, and then our oldest brother, Jimmy, in February 2018, Mike and I were the only two left from our immediate family. Mike passed away on April 29, just a few weeks ago. He was only sixty-two. As fate would have it, his memorial service is being held on the anniversary of the death of his only son, Sean, who was only twenty. Sean was serving in the Navy and was killed during a helicopter training exercise on May 19, 2009.

I was blessed with the chance to visit with Mike last summer. I hadn't seen him since Sean's funeral, so our visit was way overdue. It's funny, but even with the passing of many years, we were comfortable in each other's company. Initially his visit was delayed due to his getting Covid. When he was finally on his way, just hours from reaching my house, I was diagnosed with Covid myself. Having traveled over two-thousand miles already, he wasn't about to turn back. My big brother helped take care of me as I was flat on my back and completely useless. I confess, I was so grateful for his being here with me. It gave us time to talk and catch up properly. Once I was feeling human again, we were able to visit with family in Indiana before he started the long drive back home.



When we were younger, way before 'Pong' was even a thing, Mike and I would play board games for hours. Our favorite game was Risk, and Mike always insisted on having the black pieces. Sure enough, they looked ominous on the board as he skillfully and methodically dominated the world, or basically 'kicked my butt' nearly every time. We were fairly close during his last two years of high school since I was only two years behind him. After high school, he spent a lot of time up in northern California fishing with our uncle. Eventually, he joined the Army and was sent to Germany where he met and married Maria. Both Jenny and Sean were born there as well. Mike served over ten years and was a Desert Storm Veteran.

Mike leaves behind his ex-wife, but best friend, Maria, and their beautiful daughter, Jennifer. He is also greatly missed by his little service dog, Zoe. And of course, there is me. I know I'm not the only person to be the 'last in the family' to remain. But if you ever find yourself in this position, it is a very odd feeling. Especially when each family member died so very young. Our dad was forty-eight, mom was fifty-seven, Susie was fifty-nine, and both Jimmy and Mike, only sixty-two. As I approach my sixtieth birthday, it is understandable why I might ponder my own mortality.



I don't say this out of arrogance or assumption, and I could be completely wrong, but I have a feeling I'm going to be around for a long time. First of all, I think this way simply because I long for my heavenly home so very much, and I know God has a great sense of humor. The irony. But truly, in my heart I can feel God telling me I have a lot more to do yet.

A few blogs ago, I shared how I believed that my family member's lives may have been cut short due to the choices they have made, both spiritually and physically. I did not grow up in a godly home and believe me when I say our life would have served as a perfect example for a dysfunctional family. Without a doubt, I still carry the scars from those years, and I wouldn't go back if you paid me, but I don't say this to put down my parents or my siblings. As scriptures say, the hardships we endure may go back for generations.

I know my parents did the best they knew how. I will honor their memory with that sentiment. My mom and dad did not take care of themselves, period. My sister and both of my brothers did not take care of themselves. I'm speaking in generalities, but I think that is all that is necessary. Mike did quit smoking years ago, but my parents and both Jimmy and Susie smoked all the time. You just can't do that to your body. And spiritually, speaking, I don't know where any of my family stood in their relationship with God. I am told my dad was going to church when he died, but many people go to church who don't have a relationship with Jesus. I have spent my life sharing my faith with my sister and brothers. I won't know their fate ultimately, until I am on the other side.



So with that, I will say my final farewell, first to my brother, Mike. Thank you for hanging in there with me this long. I pray I will see you again when my time comes to go home. Jimmy, we were like strangers in our later years. I idolized you when we were younger. I still have a crush on Paul McCartney because of you. Susie, there are no words to describe how I miss you. I know you were so unhappy in your life. I pray you're waiting for me. Mom, I can't even type what I want to say, so we'll leave it at that. Daddy, you left me when I needed you the most. But I still survived. I forgive you.

It is my heartfelt wish that you are a part of a family that loves each other well, and that you all love Jesus with all you are. If you are in a family that is full of pain, the answer begins with you and the choices you make. I've seen life from both sides. Trust me when I say life is much better when you make Jesus the Lord of your life.

Blessings,

Lisa Jo





*I love and miss you, big brother...*

