



Have you ever had a hero? Someone you looked up to and wanted to be like? Often someone so high in your esteem that you never dream of even getting close to how awesome he is, but wanting to be like him anyway?

I did but never told anyone.

Not even him.

My eldest brother.

Growing up, he was the best brother that I could have dreamed of. Popular in school, a great athlete, devoted to God, his family, and the poor, a person of conviction, standing up for what he believed in even when everyone else didn't, he was a real role model.

He was incredibly close to me, always looking out for me, teaching me how to play soccer (at least trying to), showing me how to get out of myself and reach out to the less fortunate, and just being there whenever I needed him.

When I grew up, I wanted to be just like him.

**That is until he decided to leave home.**

I still remember his phone call home telling us that he had found his life's calling. He was going to dedicate his life to God as a priest.

**It was the worst day of my life.**

I felt angry. Betrayed even. How could he chose God instead of me? (Yes, I was a quite self-centered ten-year-old) I couldn't imagine my life without him. I complained and I cried. I was hurt. How could he leave?

**Yet he did.**

Next time I saw him, it just wasn't the same. He had changed. He was all holy and into this thing called "the mission of saving souls." He no longer wanted to watch movies or

play video games. When he talked, he even sounded like a priest. Where did my brother go? It almost seemed as if he went away and disappeared forever. I felt lost. Empty. Like a chasm opened up in my heart.

I wanted things to be just like they were. I wanted him to come back home.

**But he didn't.**

**In the end, I had to suck it up and keep on going.**

Life continues to run its course and wouldn't wait for me. I went to school, hung out with friends, and tried living again. Little by little, I grew to accept the fact that my brother had gone away. It hurt, but what could I do?

Now and then I'd see my brother, but, as time went on, things became harder and more formal between us. Everything seemed to be about God and the mission, and as we began to grow distant, I hid my real self from him, afraid to show him who I really was, afraid he wouldn't understand.

**I loved my brother, but he was changing. Becoming someone I didn't recognize. Someone I didn't know.**

Fast forward several years. I was seventeen years old and, to everyone's surprise, I felt the call to the priesthood tug at my heart as well. That fall I joined the same religious order as my brother and to my surprise, we were in the same community for that year. I knew it wasn't going to be like it was before and it wasn't. He was incredibly busy, always moving, working full-time. However, we made an effort to spend time together and we had a few bonding moments, but something still wasn't the same.

**The brother I knew was still missing.**

The year passed by and before I knew it, he was gone again. Well, it seemed as if he was never there.

Three more years passed by. I turned twenty-one and headed off to Rome to continue my studies, and I had another chance. My brother would be there.

Honestly, I expected a year just like the one three years before. We'd live in the same place but lead separate lives.

**But how wrong I proved myself to be.**

I arrived and I noticed that something changed. He immediately wanted to hang out, to spend time with me, to show me around, help me learn the ropes. Almost every Sunday

we had lunch together. He wanted to be the big brother. I have to admit, at first, it was a little bit hard. At this point, I felt like I no longer knew him, like I was getting to know him for the first time. Twelve years had passed by since he left the family and our lives had changed, each living his own. But I began to get to know him as he was then, not the one my ten-year-old self knew. I got to see him in his daily life, in relation to others, and how he worked. Little by little, the days went by and we spent more and more time together, I began to open my heart, and the ice began to thaw.

### **I'll never forget the day it finally cracked.**

He and I were having dinner with a family visiting from home. It was a rainy night in Rome and we were eating on a quiet street, cramped on tables under a canopy that barely blocked the rain. As the conversation went on, the family asked us to share our stories, and we took turns recounting our journeys. My brother started and, for some reason, as I listened to him, the cloud that eleven years of distance and separation had created slowly seemed to lift and disappear. My heart opened up and I listened to him with a new spirit.

He told us of his youth, growing up, consecrating himself to God, and his journey since then. I don't know why, but it was only then that something clicked. I guess, I finally opened my heart to see him as he was. I finally understood him. I finally appreciated his journey and what he went through. I saw that what he did (leaving his home and giving his life entirely to God) was truly heroic, something the brother I knew would do. After he had finished, I felt like I wasn't looking at a stranger anymore, but rather my real brother, my old hero had resurfaced. I realized that he had left, but he did so in order to grow, to become a better person, but when he left, I had blinded myself. He had a journey to take and had to develop and grow a bigger heart, to become a better person, but I had wanted him to stay the same. I wanted him for myself. I wanted to hold on to him as he was twelve years ago.

### **I loved him so much that I didn't want him to change, and in doing so I didn't want him to be better than he was.**

But blood is thicker than water, and he still stayed my brother. He never really left. He grew.

### **And it took twelve years to see this.**

Only then did I begin to see that this transformation was something good and that I didn't lose my brother, but gained a better one. I didn't lose my hero; I gained a someone who was a hero for so many others. I didn't lose my brother; I gained a real friend. Things had changed, yes, but now I saw them in a new light. I saw that they had changed for the better.

**I then noticed that as we were talking, the rain had ceased falling. I looked up at the sky and saw the stars shining down on us.**

**Immediately, I knew that something new had begun.**

I'm sharing this story because so often love can blind us and we can actually prevent the ones we love from being the best that they can be. I made that mistake and it took twelve years to recover. We can't be afraid of letting our loved ones be the people they believe they should be. We shouldn't prevent them from making their own decisions, choosing what they believe is right, and trusting that they will find their way to happiness. Of course, we can give our opinion, help them see the situation clearly, but at the end of the day, we must let them live their lives.

**And one day, they might just be the true heroes we've always wanted them to be.**