

## Growing Up With My Favorite Brother

Theresa Berry Kelleher

From my earliest years my brother Nathan, whom we called “Brother,” made a significant contribution to my personal growth. Though a decade older, he was special to me. Because I was the tenth child in a family of thirteen, he sensed my need for attention and nurtured me with a gentle devotion, as precocious as it was precious. With our fascinating chats and his stories with philosophical overtones, my imagination was stirred, increasing my awareness of my place in the scheme of the universe.

Much of this growing up took place in the classroom of the woods which surrounded our home. With his tender yet animated voice, he brought life to his stories. During the spring and summer, the coolness of the forest was a refreshing background for fables of elves hiding under the toadstools. As we walked, the vibrant reds, yellows, and purples of the flowers with their perfumed aromas, and the cheerful chatter of the birds lifted me into my own wonderland. Shadows cast by the majestic trees lent a sense of mysticism and awe. As summer faded into fall, the myriad colors of leaves rustling above and crunching underfoot helped me discover that beauty reaches its peak as it grows older, and then nature sleeps through its winter until it awakens in the spring.

A few years later, at around age 9 or 10, I came to realize the imperfections of others in my life. It was then that during one of our walks he covered a buttercup with a piece of broken glass, framing its jagged edges with the soil. He then covered our “secret” with earth. As I pushed the dirt aside to look at it again, he remarked, “A secret beauty is hidden in everyone, but sometimes you have to go beyond the surface to find it.” I would often return to uncover my “secret” and ponder its meaning.

As I grew into my gawky, confused adolescent phase, Brother was very reassuring that this stage would only develop into an even deeper understanding of myself. While brushing my hair, he filled my head with stories of Prince Charming, promising that some day “my prince” would come. Soon after that, when he left to become a priest, our special bond continued through our correspondence. With the ups and downs that come with those teen age years, I could always count on his constant reinforcement and bits of poetic wisdom to see me through. So much later, as an adult, I attribute my sense of wonder and love of nature, my sensitivity to and compassion for people, and my faith in the future and myself, to growing up with my favorite Brother.

Theresa Berry Kelleher (deceased) was the sister of Thomas Berry. She wrote this essay for a composition class in 1984. During her lifetime she held leadership roles in church, civic, and academic affairs, and is survived by her husband Leo J. Kelleher, Jr., and their five sons and three daughters.