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# DANIELLE STEEL



*The Story of Nick Traina*

# HIS BRIGHT LIGHT

*“This is the story of an extraordinary boy with a brilliant mind, a heart of gold, and a tortured soul. It is the story of an illness, a fight to live, and a race against death.”*

**HIS BRIGHT LIGHT**

*The Story of Nick Traina*

From the day he was born, Nick Traina was his mother’s joy. By nineteen, he was dead. This is Danielle Steel’s powerful personal story of the son she lost and the lessons she learned during his courageous battle against darkness. Sharing tender, painful memories and Nick’s remarkable journals, Steel brings us a haunting duet between a singular young man and the mother who loved him—and a harrowing portrait of a masked killer called manic depression, which afflicts between two and three million Americans.

At once a loving legacy and an unsparing depiction of a devastating illness, Danielle Steel’s tribute to her lost son is a gift of life, hope, healing, and understanding to us all.

*Honored by the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill for  
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THE COTTAGE	STAR
THE KISS	ZOYA
LEAP OF FAITH	KALEIDOSCOPE
LONE EAGLE	FINE THINGS
JOURNEY	WANDERLUST
THE HOUSE ON	SECRETS
HOPE STREET	FAMILY ALBUM
THE WEDDING	FULL CIRCLE
IRRESISTIBLE FORCES	CHANGES
GRANNY DAN	THURSTON HOUSE
BITTERSWEET	CROSSINGS
MIRROR IMAGE	ONCE IN A LIFETIME
THE KLONE AND I	A PERFECT STRANGER
THE LONG ROAD HOME	REMEMBRANCE
THE GHOST	PALOMINO
SPECIAL DELIVERY	LOVE: POEMS
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SILENT HONOR	LOVING
MALICE	TO LOVE AGAIN
FIVE DAYS IN PARIS	SUMMER'S END
LIGHTNING	SEASON OF PASSION

WINGS	THE PROMISE
THE GIFT	NOW AND FOREVER
ACCIDENT	PASSION'S PROMISE
VANISHED	GOING HOME
MIXED BLESSINGS	



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# HIS BRIGHT LIGHT

*The Story of My Son, Nick Traina*

DANIELLE STEEL



To Nick, first and foremost, who had been asking me for a while to dedicate another book to him. This wasn't the one I had in mind. But this one's for you, Nick. For the lessons you taught me, the gifts that you gave me, the heart that you gave me, and all the love that we shared. Wider than the ocean, bigger than the sky. Fly well, my darling boy, until we meet again. With all my love, Mom.

To Julie, who gave him a life he never would have had otherwise. She gave him joy, and freedom, and respect, and safety, and wisdom, and most of all, love. She gave him the adulthood he wanted and deserved. To her husband, Bill, for being his friend. And to Serena and Chris, for opening their hearts and lives to Nick.

To Paul and Cody, for giving so tirelessly, from their hearts ... and going to all those concerts!!!

To Dr. Seifried, for keeping him going for so long, and caring about him so much.

To Max Leavitt, Sammy (the Mick) Ewing, and Thea Anderson for giving their hearts forever, and beyond.

To Chuck (Erin Mason), for being there when it really counted.

To Jo Schuman Silver, who was his special friend, whom he adored, and who adored him.

To Camilla and Lucy, for years and years and years of loving.

To Mort Janklow, for believing in this book, me, and Nicky.

To Carole Baron, for asking me to write it.

To John, for our lost dreams, and all you did for Nick. The doctors, the solutions, the medicines, and the loving father you were to him.

To Tom, for being there for me, and because Nick loved you. And for encouraging me to write this book, and getting me through it.

To Bill, for giving me Nicky, and being there for me when we lost him, and being my friend.

To all the people who cared so much about him, rejoiced for him, laughed with him, cried for him. To all those who worked so hard to make his life as good as it could be, secretaries and nurses and doctors, people in the music world, and all our friends, all the people who were there for him, and made a difference.

And to my beloved children, Beatrix, Trevor, Todd, Samantha, Victoria, Vanessa, Maxx and Zara, for being the best brothers and sisters in the world, and the most precious gifts in my life, just as Nick was, and is, and always will be. For the love and strength and laughter that we share, that you gave Nick, and that he gave us. May you be forever blessed, and may you never again know a sorrow and loss like this one.

With all my love,  
d.s.

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It is not growing like a tree  
In bulk, doth make men better be;  
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,  
To fall a log at last, dry, bald and sere:  
A lily of the day,  
Is fairer far in May,  
Although it fall and die that night;  
It was the plant and flower of light.

Ben Jonson

“No matter how much I put in the bank  
every day, I wake up broke every morning.”

Nick Traina  
August 1997

Mom ...

I have known a million people  
But never one like you  
Many of my friends are special  
But I still don't have a clue  
How you got to be so wonderful  
The world's most perfect mom  
You've always loved and helped me  
Even when I was wrong  
I'm sorry that I've hurt you  
I'm sorry I've made you cry  
I'll do my best to make you proud  
I promise I will try  
Everyone sees hardship  
And everyone feels pain  
And if anyone knows it's you and me  
That sun will shine through rain  
You've given me so much  
That words are not enough  
To say how much I love you  
I'm trying and it's tough  
Without you I'd be nowhere  
You believed in me no matter what  
My arms are always open  
I promise you they'll never shut  
I have more respect for you  
Than any woman alive  
And my shoulder is always here  
If you ever need to cry  
Everything will turn out fine  
Because I will always love you  
Until the day I die



Nick Traina  
August 1996

## Prologue

This will not be an easy book to write, but there is much to say, in my own words, and my son's. And as hard as it may be to write, it's worth doing, if it helps someone.

It is hard to encapsulate a being, a very special being, a soul, a smile, a boy, a huge talent, an enormous heart, a child, a man, in however many pages. Yet I must try, for him, for myself, for you. And I hope that as I do, you will come to understand who he was, and what he meant to all those who knew him.

This is the story of an extraordinary boy, with a brilliant mind, a heart of gold, and a tortured soul. It is the story of an illness, a fight to live, and a race against death. It is early days for me yet, as I write this. He has been gone a short time. My heart still aches. The days seem endless. I still cry at the sound of his name. I wander into his room and can still smell his familiar smell. His words still echo in my ears. He was alive only days, weeks ago ... so little time, and yet he is gone. It is still impossible to absorb or understand. Harder still to accept. I look at his photographs, and cannot imagine that all that life and love and energy has vanished. That funny, handsome face, that brilliant smile, the heart I knew better than my own, the best friend he became to me, can they truly be gone? Do they live only in memory? Even now, it remains beyond my comprehension, and is sometimes beyond bearing. How did it all happen? How did we lose him? How could we have tried so hard, and cared so much, and loved him so enormously, and still have lost him? If love alone could have kept him alive, he would have lived to be three hundred years old. But sometimes, even loving with all your heart and soul and all your mind and will just doesn't do it. Sadly, it didn't do it for Nick.

If I had three wishes, one would be that he had never suffered from mental illness, the other would be of course that he were alive today, but the third would be that someone had warned me, at some point, that his illness—manic depression—could kill him. Perhaps they did. Perhaps they told me in some subtle way. Maybe the

inference was there, and I didn't want to hear it. But I listened carefully to everything that was said to me over the years, I examined every nuance, and to the best of my knowledge and abilities, heeded every warning. My recollection is that no one told me. Certainly not clearly. And it was a piece of information that I desperately needed. I'm not sure we would have done things any differently, but at least I would have known, been warned, of what the worst case could be.

His illness killed him as surely as if it had been a cancer. I wish I had known that, that I had been warned how great the risk was. Perhaps then I would have been better prepared for what came later. I'm not sure that in the minds of the public it is clear that bipolar disease, manic depression as it's more commonly called, is potentially fatal. Not always certainly, but in far too many cases. Suicide and accidents appear to be the greatest cause of death for manic-depressives. Neither are uncommon. If I had been told that he had cancer of a major organ, I would have known with certainty how great the risk was. I might have understood how short his life could be, how tragic the implication. I'm sure I would have fought just as hard, just as long, just as ingeniously, but I would have been better prepared for what came later. The defeat might not have been quite as startling or as stunning, though it would surely have been just as devastating.

The purpose of this book is to pay tribute to him, and to what he accomplished in his short life. Nick was an extraordinary human being, with joy and wisdom, and remarkably profound and astute perceptions about himself and others. He faced life with courage and panache and passion and humor. He did everything "more" and better and harder. He loved harder and more, he laughed a lot, and made us laugh, and cry, and try so hard to save him. No one who met him was left unimpressed or unaffected. You couldn't meet him and not give a damn. He made you care and feel and want to be as big as he was. He was very big. The biggest.

I have written this book to honor and remember him. But there is yet another purpose in writing this book. I want to share the story, and the pain, the courage, the love, and what I learned in living through it. I want Nick's life to be not only a tender memory for us, but a gift to others. There is much to learn here, not only about one life, but about a disease that afflicts between two and three million Americans, one third of whom, it is believed, die from it, possibly as many as two thirds. That is a terrifying statistic. The statistics are somewhat "soft" on the issue of fatalities, because often death is attributed to other things, for instance "accidental overdose" rather than suicide, which is determined by the actual amount of fatal substances ingested, rather than by clear motive.

It is debatable as to whether or not those who have died could have been saved, or if those who will die can be. But what of those who will live, and have lived, and are still living? How do we help them? What can we do? Sadly, no one, and certainly not I, has the magic answers to solve the problem. There are different options, different solutions, a variety of ways of coping. But first, you have to see the problem. You have to understand what you're dealing with, to accept that what you're dealing with is the equivalent of not just a bellyache, but liver cancer. You have to know that what you're facing is serious, important, dangerous, and potentially fatal.

Somewhere out there, in apartments, and homes, and hospitals, in ordinary jobs and lives, and not just psychiatric wards, are people coping with a terrible struggle within them. And alongside them are the people who know and love them. I would like to reach out here, and to offer hope and the realities we lived with. I want to make a difference. My hope is that someone will be able to use what we learned, and save a life with it. Maybe you can make a difference, even if I couldn't. If it is true that one third of manic-depressives die of this disease, and its related burdens, then two thirds will live. Two thirds can be helped, and can live a useful existence. And if possible, I would like Nick's story, and Nick's life, to help them, to serve them, perhaps to learn from our mistakes, and our victories.

The greatest lessons I learned were of courage, and love, energy, ingenuity, and persistence. We never gave up, never turned away, never turned on him, never let him go, until he let us go, because he couldn't fight the fight any longer. We not only gave him CPR when he attempted suicide, but we tried to keep his soul alive in every way we could, so that he could keep fighting the fight along with us. And the real victory for him, and for us, was that we gave him a quality of life he might otherwise never have had. He was able to pursue a career he loved, in music. He saw victories that few people do, at twice his age, or who live a great deal longer. He knew the joy and excitement of success, and also knew better than most the price he paid for it. He had friends, a life, a family, a career, he had fun and happiness and sorrow. He moved through the last few years of his life with surprising grace, despite the handicaps he was born with. And we were incredibly proud of him, as a man, a musician, and a human being. He was a talented, brilliant young man with a disease. But the disease did not stop him from being who he was, or us from loving him as he was. In retrospect, I think it was one of the best gifts we gave him. Acceptance of who he was, and unconditional love. In our eyes at least, his illness was only one facet of him, not the whole of him.

There is no denying that it is a hard, hard road, loving someone with bipolar disease. There are times when you want to scream, days when you think you can't do it anymore, weeks when you know you haven't made a difference and only wish you could, moments when you want to turn your back on it. It is their problem, not yours, and yet it becomes yours if you love the person suffering from it. You have no choice. You must stand by them. You are trapped, as surely as the patient is. And you will hate that trap at times, hate what it does to your life, your days, your own sanity. But hate it or not, you are there, and whatever it takes, you have to make the best of it.

I can only tell you what we did, what we tried, what worked, and what failed. You can learn from what we tried to accomplish, and develop better avenues that work for you. We tried a lot of things, and flew by the seat of our pants some of the time. There are no rule books, no manuals, no instruction sheets, no norms. You just have to feel your way along in the dark and do the best you can. You can't do more than that. And if you're very lucky, what you're doing works. If you're not, it won't, and then you try something else. You try anything and everything you can until the very end, and then all you have is knowing how hard you tried. Nick knew. He knew how hard we tried for him, and he tried too. We respected each other so much for it. We loved each other incredibly because we had been through so much together, and we cared so much. He and I were very much alike actually, more than we realized for many years. He said it in the end. He made me laugh. He made me smile. He was not only my son, but my best friend. And I am doing this for him, to honor him, and to help those who need to know what we learned, what we did, what we should have done, and shouldn't have done. And if it helps someone then it is worth reliving it all, and sharing his joys and his agonies with you. I am not doing it to expose him, or myself, but to help you.

Would I do it all again? Yes. In a minute. I wouldn't give away these nineteen years for anything in the world. I wouldn't give up the pain or the torment or the sheer frustration, or the occasional misery of it, because there was so much joy and happiness that went with it. There was nothing better in life than knowing that things were going well for him. I would not have missed a single instant with him. He taught me more about love and joy and courage and the love of life and wonderful outrageousness than anything or anyone else in my life ever will. He gave me the gifts of love and compassion and understanding and acceptance and tolerance and patience, wrapped in laughter, straight from his heart. And now I share these gifts with you.

Love is meant to be shared, and pain is meant to be soothed. If I can share your pain, and soothe it with the love Nick shared with all of us, then his life will be yet one more gift, not only to me and his family this time, but to you.

It was Nick who made it all worthwhile, and worth fighting for. He did it for us, and for himself, and we for him. It was a dance of love from beginning to end. His was a life worth living, whatever the handicaps and challenges. I think he'd agree with that. And I have no doubt of it. I have no regrets, no matter how hard it was. I wouldn't have given up one second with him. And what happened in the end was his destiny. As his song says, "Destiny ... dance with me, my destiny." And how sweet the music was. The sound of it will forever live on, just like Nick, and our love for him.

He was a priceless gift. He taught me everything worth knowing about life and love. May God bless and keep him, and smile with him, until we meet again.

And may God keep you safe on your journey.

d.s.

# 1

## *The Journey Begins*

I met Nick's father on his thirty-first birthday, on a sunny day in June. Bill was intelligent, employed, and had a Jean-Paul Belmondo quality to him. He was immensely attractive, well read, well educated, and extremely bright, came from a respectable family, and had nice parents. He had a lot going for him, but also a somewhat checkered past. It was something he touched on but didn't explain in detail.

He was the product of a Jesuit education, had gone to college, played football, and took masters courses in psychology shortly after we met. In his youth he had gotten into drugs, and long since gotten off them. When we met, he neither drugged nor drank. At all. I was impressed by that, as I didn't drink then, and don't now, and all my life have stayed well away from drugs, and people who use them.

There are a number of things that still stand out in my mind about him, other things I've forgotten, or maybe chosen to lose somewhere. I have told myself for two decades that he only spent moments in my life. But now, as I look back over every instant of Nick's life, and the days that led up to it, as I sort through photographs and reach back into the past, I remember things that I had long since chosen to forget. His many qualities. His charm. His appeal to women. We were not in each other's lives for very long, but he made an indelible impression. And our paths having crossed again because of Nick, I realize again now what a good person he was, and is. In some ways, the person he is now not only restored my faith in him, but in myself.

At thirty-one he was a quiet man, he loved the outdoors, loved to fish, and was somewhat shy. He had a great many qualities, some of which I saw

in Nick later. I thought he was lucky to have the support of devoted parents who thought he could do no wrong, and, like me, he was an only child. I have no idea if things would ever have worked out between us under normal circumstances. It's hard to say. He was carrying burdens I knew nothing about, and suffering from his own demons. I don't know if the manic-depressive gene came from some branch of his family tree, or mine, there is no way to know that. There has never been mental illness in my family, that I know of. And the only evidence of something awry on Bill's side was his addiction to drugs, which I didn't discover until later.

I have always believed that in many instances, if not all, drug addiction is actually an issue of people medicating themselves, though I don't know if in Bill's case it was. I don't think anyone knows how these things happen, or why.

I knew little of his history in those early days after we met, and was probably not knowledgeable or sophisticated enough to understand all that I saw. We had both been married previously, and I had a nine-year-old child by my first marriage, my eldest daughter, Beatrix. I know now what I must have hoped and suspected then, that Bill is a decent, loving man. His life has taken him through jungles of agony, but his soul has somehow managed to survive, I believe him to be a good person, and since Nick's death, we have become friends.

We became involved that summer, and six weeks after we met, I got pregnant, which needless to say, came as something of a surprise. There is no debate about how appropriate it was or wasn't. I was still painfully young at the time, having married at eighteen the first time. But I was old enough to know better. In retrospect, later on, somewhat wiser and more suspicious of myself, I wondered if I had secretly wanted another child. Or maybe it was just blind luck. In any case, the realization of what had happened hit us like a bomb. Neither of us were prepared to consider marriage, and a month or two of trauma then ensued while we agonized about what to do about it.

As I recall, Bill was very decent about it, though understandably unnerved. Six weeks into a relationship, pregnancy is not what anyone would hope for. I was religiously opposed to an abortion for myself, though I will admit to having considered it under the circumstances. I was unmarried, with no plan to marry Bill, had a child to help support, and was



not yet earning more than an adequate living. Supporting a baby was going to be a major challenge, and I did not ask or expect Bill to do so, nor could he afford to at the time.

It also provided a moral and social dilemma for me. I lived in a world where a child born out of wedlock would not be viewed with favor. And to complicate matters further, although we had not lived together for many years, my previous divorce was not yet final. So even if Bill and I had wanted to marry immediately, we couldn't. And last but not least, I was worried about the example I would be setting for my daughter, and what she would think about it then and over time. The lack of wisdom I showed then is not an example I would want to set for any of my children even now.

But despite the obvious problems, I decided to go ahead and have the baby. Bill and I agreed to live separately, but continue to see each other. We were hopeful that things would work out between us, but it was by no means a sure thing. Even then, I perceived problems in the relationship, and Bill and I were very different. I did not tell my parents, who were living three thousand miles away. I saw them seldom, and I knew that news of this kind was, understandably, going to be met with horror on their part. I did not come from a world where accidental babies, or illegitimate children, were warmly received. My parents, and particularly my father, were not going to be amused. Nor was I. It was a serious endeavor, and I knew that from that time on, my life was going to be even harder than it had been. I was earning a living, but things were tight, and just about everyone I knew was going to be shocked. I envisioned myself as a social outcast, probably alone for the rest of my life, with no husband, and two children to support. And if I delve back into memory to that time, I remember all too easily that I was scared to death, and in one hell of a mess. But I felt I had to make the best of it, for my daughter's sake, and that of the unborn baby. From what I could see, I was looking ahead down a long, hard, lonely road.

And miraculously, within days of making the decision to have the baby, I was offered a writing project that would cover, literally to the penny, what I had figured out it would cost to have the baby: doctor, diapers, hospital, clothes. The sum offered me was exactly what I needed to get by. It was one hurdle I'd made it safely over, but I knew there would be countless more to follow. I had written roughly seven books by then, but only two had sold. And I was making a living, or had been, writing advertising copy, doing

translations, teaching English and creative writing, and even taking occasional jobs in stores. The new project meant that I could write full-time. No small miracle to me at the time.

The next hurdle to be overcome was that I had to tell my daughter that I was having a baby, a moral dilemma I agonized over, an outstanding example of “Do as I say, not as I’ve done.” I didn’t want her making the same mistakes as I when she grew up (and she hasn’t). You were supposed to fall in love, get married, then have a baby, not get pregnant and not get married, and be involved with someone you barely knew, whom you only saw from time to time. It was everything I didn’t want for her, or myself. And by then, I suspect Bill and I had figured out that we were not a perfect match. He had other pressures in his life, about which I knew nothing yet, we had different interests and lives. Had we been dating, without the pressure of a baby, the romance would probably have already fizzled out, and certainly been less stressful. With a baby coming, the pressure was on us, individually, and together. It was a very tough time.

My daughter was utterly remarkable, and instead of shock or disapproval or embarrassment in the face of the painfully honest confession I made, she embraced my news with excitement, enthusiasm, and open arms. She was thrilled. She had always wanted a sibling, and she was embarrassingly pleased that this was going to be “our baby,” and we wouldn’t have to share it with anyone else. It was, if anything, an optimistic way of looking at the situation, and warmed my heart. It formed an airtight bond between us which has never diminished. Even at nine, she was never critical, and endlessly supportive.

Interestingly, the thought of heredity never crossed my mind at the time. I don’t know if I was just naive, or it was simply an era when people didn’t worry as much about that. It never dawned on me to question with any real seriousness “Who is this man? Who is the father of my baby?” I saw the baby as a separate entity from each of us. But even if I had fully understood the potential time bomb of heredity, I wouldn’t have done things any differently. I felt I had no choice but to have the child and make the best of it later.

For the next few months Bill and I saw each other, and when I was six months pregnant, he decided to move in with me, and see how it worked out. I agreed, although I was nervous about it, but it seemed we owed the

baby at least that much. And by then, we were talking vaguely of marriage, although I don't believe we would have been, had I not been pregnant. (At that point, my parents still did not know that I was pregnant, and I was dreading the announcement to them.)

But within days of moving in, Bill began to vanish. He would disappear for hours and days, behave oddly when he returned, and seemed somehow different than he had been when we met. He was never violent or aggressive, but mostly elusive. His appearance changed from impeccable to disheveled, and his disappearances rapidly became more frequent and longer. I had no idea where he was, with whom, or what he was doing. Sometimes he would come home at one or two A.M. and be gone again before I got up in the morning. His life was more of a mystery to me than ever. His disappearances were a mystery to me as well. In fact, almost everything about him was. The most important thing I knew about him was that I was having his baby. What I didn't know, and didn't understand, was that he had quietly gone back to using drugs, and I had no inkling of it. Being unfamiliar with that world, I did not recognize the signs.

When I was seven months pregnant, he came down with hepatitis, which complicated life further for me and Beatrix, and I took care of him until he recovered. And at eight months, when Bill was back on his feet again, the disappearances resumed, and he got into a car accident, while driving my car. It was at that point that I finally understood what had happened, and the kind of chaos drugs were causing in Bill's life, and would cause in mine, if I let that happen. It was a terrifying dilemma for me. It was a world I wanted no part of, for myself, or my children.

I was eight months pregnant by then, and finally told my parents about the baby over the phone. There was an endless silence, a pause that went on for aeons, and then my father's voice like ice. My father wanted only one thing, for us to get married. Impossible to explain to him that I hadn't seen Bill in days at that point, and when I did he was passing through my house like an express train. I barely had time to say hello before he was gone again, never mind discussing marriage. And how could I marry someone in Bill's situation? On the one hand, I wanted to legitimize the child, and on the other, I was terrified of the problems I would be getting into. I did not tell my family of Bill's history with drugs. But in the end, despite the

reservations I had, there seemed to be no other choice but to get married. My divorce was final by then, and marriage was in fact an option. Unfortunately, it was a time fraught with anxiety, and not one I remember fondly.

Bill was gone most of the time, and he never showed up to buy the ring, or get the license. In the end, we were married without one, by “special license.” And as a result of his disappearances and the stress over what was happening, I literally had hysterics when he finally showed up the night before the wedding. We were married the next day, in a small ceremony, and had lunch with friends at a restaurant. And by that night, he had vanished. It was a week before my due date. The only consolation was that my father was relieved that we had done it, and I hoped that things would settle down with Bill in time.

It was a nightmarish time. My daughter was staying with her father for a couple of weeks until the baby came, and I was alone most of the time. And for some reason, Bill reappeared the night before the baby was born. He spent the night, and got me as far as the hospital, stayed for a while, and then disappeared again. He was in worse shape than I by the time he left. Seriously addicted by then, he had to take care of his own needs, while I remained alone with a friend for long hours of hard labor while Bill came and went.

For the next twelve hours, while I was in labor, Bill reappeared and disappeared again. And unfortunately, so did my obstetrician. He was called away for an emergency and left me in the care of his partners, while fate threw me an impossible situation, a few cruel tricks, and a nightmarish labor. The baby weighed over ten pounds, and I am very small-boned and a small person. Bluntly put, he got stuck, which provided an experience of such hideous proportions for me that I wound up with temporary problems with my heart and lungs, asthma, and a number of other complications. I lay in agony for twelve hours, left to residents, and changing shifts of labor nurses and doctors who didn't know me.

To me, it seemed that the only real miracle was that I didn't die, nor did the baby. An emergency cesarean section was finally performed by my own doctor twelve hours after I arrived at the hospital. And I was surprised that I survived it. It was the hardest delivery of any I've had, mostly due to the baby's size.

The one most remarkable thing about the delivery that everybody was talking about was the fact that when they made the first incision, the baby cried loudly through it, which is very rare. To me, it seemed like a happy sign, a lust for life, and a good omen. It was the first of May, a day for celebration.

The baby, a boy, was so huge at ten pounds one ounce that he was put in an incubator, as apparently overly large babies are sometimes fragile. He looked enormous to me, with huge eyes and dark hair. He looked six months old and so beautiful that every moment of agony seemed worth it for him. He owned my heart from the moment I laid eyes on him. He seemed perfect in every way. And I was so grateful that he seemed to have come to no harm in the delivery that I was more than willing to overlook the fact that the delivery had been agonizing and traumatic for me. It has been suggested since that the long labor may have caused some neurological damage, and learning disabilities that we discovered later on. But there is no way to know that. The problems that Nicholas developed in later life were, for the most part, genetic, we think, as most mental illness is, but the suggested neurological damage and learning disabilities might have been caused or aggravated by birth trauma. It was never a line of thinking we pursued or blamed anyone for later. We had enough to deal with worrying about his being bipolar.

But then, who knew what was to come later on? All I knew and cared about was that this long-awaited baby had finally come, and he looked like a cherub in my arms. I was grateful to have survived, and to take my baby home with me. His arrival had been extraordinarily traumatic but seemed well worth it to me.

Bill appeared hours late to drive us home from the hospital, and predictably, disappeared again within the hour. I cried a lot. Beatrix came home, and fell instantly in love with the baby. My father died ten days later, having never seen the baby, but relieved that I was married at least. I called my lawyer the day after the delivery and tried to have the marriage annulled, or at least to start the wheels turning towards a divorce, but then dropped it for a while, and finally filed the divorce later, after our problems became too much for me.

Bill came and went for a brief time after Nick was born. He made an unsuccessful attempt to clean up when Nicky was about four weeks old and

again later. In the end, his eventual victory over drugs took him long years to achieve, and Nick and I were long since out of his life by the time he did it.

What ensued after Nick's birth, for Bill, was a nineteen-year fall down an abyss from which he did not return until Nick was gone. He disappeared out of our lives as quickly as he had come. No matter how good his intentions, and I believe they were, the pull of his addiction was so powerful it could not be stopped. It was like a tidal wave that nearly drowned him, and fortunately for him, in the end, didn't.

It was sadder for him in the end than it was for us, because we were able to put our lives back together eventually. And he missed so much. He missed it all, an entire life. He never knew his son, although he returned after Nick's death, healthy again, and in recovery, to offer me a hand in friendship, and solace both to me and Nick's siblings. And I was, and am, grateful for the support he gave me.

At the time, Beatrix and I were left alone with Nicholas, a miraculous gift in our lives. He was healthy and fat and happy and beautiful, and adored. And Bill was gone to his own life. Beatie and I were on our own, with "our" baby, our beloved Nicky. And he was the happiest, fattest, sweetest baby we have ever seen.