

# Chapter 9

## *Of Infinite Worth*

Even though Lee and I couldn't have any more children, that didn't mean that we were finished bringing children into our home. There was still one more little boy who needed to come and live with us. His name is Casey, and this is his story.

My younger brother started dating a girl named Mary. She told him she was eighteen, but in reality, she was only fifteen. Before long, and with the consent of her parents, they decided to get married.

Their first child was a little girl they named Michelle. The following year, they had a baby boy. They named him Casey. Mary had one more baby, a little girl they named Jody. Shortly after she was born, however, Mary came to my brother and said, "I'm done. I'm through being a mother. I'm through being your wife. I'm not doing this anymore." And she walked out of their lives.

My brother was devastated. He loved her so much. He adored his three children, and this was an extremely difficult ordeal for him to go through. Michelle was three, Casey was eighteen months old, and Jody, just eight months old. My brother, of course, had to work to provide for the kids, so my mother and I would help out by taking care of the children while he went to work. He'd stop by after work and pick them up.

He kept trying to convince Mary to come back. He wanted to patch things up and refused to sign the divorce papers, insisting that things could be like they once were. But Mary wanted no part of it. Finally, she told him that she had something to tell him that would help convince him to sign the papers. She informed him that he was not the father of their last baby. She went through the court system to get custody of only the youngest baby, then left to marry another man.

Following their divorce, my brother remained single for a number of years. Eventually he met a girl, fell in love, and they decided to marry. Casey was now six years old.

We were very excited for my brother and his new bride. She'd also been through a divorce, and had two children, a boy and a girl. This meant that they would have two girls and two boys in their combined family. We were so happy to see them get together. It seemed like the perfect fit, and things seemed to be going well, at least for a while.

Before long, they began having conflicts and these conflicts seemed to be focused on Casey. My brother and his wife determined that if this marriage was going to survive, Casey would have to leave. Everyone felt just awful about it.

For years now, while these little kids had no mother around, my mother helped take care of them. Mom and I only lived two farm fields away from each other and the kids would walk back and forth to play together... Casey always wanted to spend the night at our house, and he especially loved following Jason around. When it looked like Casey was going to be moved out of their house, I offered to take him in. But, for whatever reason, my brother didn't think he should live with us. Maybe it was because he'd already spent a lot of time with us. Instead, they asked my older sister if she'd be willing to take him in. She said she would.

It wasn't very long, however, before this little boy who was usually very nice and calm, started acting out against my sister's children. He would hit them and yell at them and was creating real problems in their home. I believed this was just Casey's way of trying to get them to send him back home to be with his father. He loved him so much and just wanted to be with him.

So, my brother took Casey back home and tried to make things work. But it didn't last long. Casey was shuffled in and out of four different homes, each with their own set of problems, each time without success.

By this time, we'd sold our home for health **and** financial reasons, and moved to the Southern part of our state where the climate was much warmer. Casey was now ten years old. One day he came to our home for a visit. We had a great time. In fact, we hated to see him leave, and then one day I got a phone call...

"Aunt Lin? This is Casey. Can I come and live with you and Uncle Lee? I can't live here anymore, and I don't want to be the cause of my dad and mom fighting. So, can I come and live with you?"

This was an extremely difficult thing for me. It broke my heart that this little boy wasn't able to be raised by my brother. Yet I knew that there was something that made it impossible for Casey to live there. Lee and I talked it over to see if we thought this would be a good solution for everyone involved.

We asked our kids how they felt about Casey coming to live with us. We'd been through a lot as a family, and we'd had some problems with our own kids needing special attention. Now we were considering taking in another little boy with a lot of baggage.

However, the kids agreed it would be the right thing to do so we took him in. I was really quite surprised how well he fit in with our family. Yes, he had some issues and problems we needed to work through, but overall it was a great fit.

Casey still loved his dad very much, and he really missed his family, and when he'd return home to us after a visit, he would just cry and cry, and we would have to help him adjust all over again. It eventually got to the point where he was so worried that he would say or do something wrong when he went to visit that he'd almost get sick. He was so afraid that his father would tell him he couldn't come and visit him anymore. It really caused him a lot of stress. His dad would pick him up, take him home, do fun things with him, build up his hopes that he might be able to stay with him... and then bring him back, drop him off, and then we would have to deal with the emotional devastation that *always* followed.

I finally had a talk with my brother. I told him I was concerned about Casey constantly having to ride this emotional roller coaster. I suggested that it would be better if *he* came to visit Casey in *our* town. I didn't feel it was fair to Casey to keep sending him there, build up his hopes, only to be sent away again. It was really difficult for me to talk with my brother about this situation. I loved him and didn't want to cause problems for him or for his family, but I knew it would be best for Casey in the long run.

This was a difficult time for Casey. He wanted to fit in so bad. I remember one time when Casey got hit by a baseball during a game and got knocked out. We took him to the hospital where they examined him to make sure there wasn't any permanent damage. They asked him if he felt OK. He

said he did. They pointed to Lee and me and asked him who we were. He said, "That's my mom and that's my dad."

I know he felt a great love for us, but he was so confused about family, and loyalties, and especially his relationship with his own father. It was very hard on him. He began to wonder if he should have called us Mom and Dad, and if he did call Lee "Dad," would it be a betrayal of his own father?

Lee recognized his frustration and concerns and did his best to alleviate them."

"It's OK, Casey" Lee told him, "you can call us Uncle Lee and Aunt Linda, or you can call us "Rent-A-Mom" and "Rent-A-Dad". Call us whatever you want to, it's fine with us. You just call us whatever makes you feel the most comfortable."

After Casey had lived with us for about three years, his father called up one day, and said he wanted him to come home. He said that he thought they could make it work this time.

Casey was so excited! The thought that he might really be able to return home to his family was almost too good to be true. He looked at us and was smiling so big, and then his expression changed... and he started to cry.

"What's the matter, Casey?" I asked.

He said, "What if I go back there and they decide they don't want me *again*? What will I do? Where will I go?" My heart just ached for him, and it was hard to know just what to tell him.

I remember very distinctly Lee looking at him, and saying, "If you can't live there, then you just come back home, because this will always be your home, and you'll always be welcome here."

Suddenly, the smile returned to his face. He was so relieved to know that he could come back here if he needed to. I could see it was a great relief and comfort to him.

Well, it didn't work out! He returned home to us once again, and it was a heartbreaking reunion. He cried and cried and cried. I told him that it was all right to cry and be angry with his dad. I was angry with him, too. I told him that sometimes people do things that aren't right, and it's all right to be angry about that. It doesn't mean you don't love them. "Hey, he's my brother and

I'm very angry with him... but I still love him. I just don't agree with some of the decisions he makes," I told Casey.

The whole family was very supportive of Casey. Jenny was almost a year younger, but because of the emotional stresses in his early life, Casey had to repeat first grade. This put Jenny and him in the same grade. Some people used to actually think they were twins. Jenny and Casey became best friends. They constantly watched out for and supported each other in everything they did.

Casey really became a member of our family. He was the same age Josh would have been if he'd lived, and in many ways, he helped fill that void in our lives. Of all the children, he was the most obedient, doing everything we asked of him, and always trying to be helpful.

As a matter of fact, it was kind of funny. One day, one of the other kids said to him, "You're making us look bad. Why do you always do stuff like that?"

He looked at them and said, "I'm just so happy you guys took me in, and that I have a family. I don't want to do anything that would make it so you guys don't want me to be here and be part of this family."

We gained so much from having this young man in our lives. He's taught us a lot about forgiveness.

When he turned nineteen, he very much wanted to serve a mission for our church. We weren't sure how we would provide the financial assistance it would require to keep him out for two years, since we constantly struggled with our own finances. But after talking it over, Lee and I decided that we just didn't have the heart to tell him he couldn't go. We would send him out and trust in God to help us find a way to support him.

Fortunately, good friends and many faithful people in our local congregation recognized that we would need assistance with this venture. They also recognized that this would be a great opportunity for service for them. Our church leader told us that the people in our congregation would pick up the bulk of his mission expenses.

After Casey returned home from his mission, his father once again invited him to come home and live, which he did. This time, things finally seemed to go better for everyone concerned.

I'm just grateful they were finally able to be reunited together as a family. I have to believe in my heart, that my brother honestly tried to do what he thought was best for Casey. At least now they may finally be able to establish a good father/son relationship.

Casey eventually found a wonderful girl to marry. Her name was Rebecca. She had a son named Ethan, from a previous relationship. Casey adored Ethan.

Ethan's biological father had relinquished his parental rights, giving full custody to Rebecca. Rebecca was a good mother and Ethan was her priority in life. She would only date men she believed would be a good father to Ethan. She once told me, "I couldn't have found a more perfect man to love both Ethan and me." She would sometimes joke with Casey saying, "I think you want to marry me just so you can be Ethan's dad." You see, Casey understood perfectly the emotions that must have been going on in little Ethan's mind, because he'd been there himself.

In fact, Casey told me once that he felt like his life's experiences had prepared him to be a better father to Ethan. I think he personally learned so much about rejection and heartache, that he was willing to do whatever it took to provide love and support for his newly acquired son. He didn't want this little boy to have to go through the things he'd gone through as a child. Rebecca agreed, and the three of them got married. I say the three of them, because they were inseparable. They did everything together as a family. Their matching flip-flops became their trade mark.

Nothing seemed more important to them than time spent together, reading, talking, playing games, and most of all camping together. Casey tried very hard to be a good father to Ethan. A year after their marriage, Ethan became a big brother to a cute little baby boy they named Tajan. I had never seen them happier. Casey was so proud of his little family. He loved being a husband and father.

I will cherish the brief time I was able to spend with them, and I'm grateful for the opportunity I had to hold their sweet baby Tajan. Ethan would watch me to make sure I was doing it right. Rebecca was perfect for Casey and she had a way of making everyone feel so important. She included Jenny in their lives and was always so kind to her. Lee and Rebecca always joked with each other and made everyone else laugh, too.

Our family was growing and really starting to be a lot of fun. Lee and I were really enjoying being Grammy and Papa.

We were scheduled to have our family picture taken the week of the accident. We wanted to wait for Tajan to arrive so that the picture would be complete.

Unfortunately, you know the rest of *that* story. Tajan only lived nineteen days when both he and his sweet mother were taken from us.

There's a song that says. . ."It seems the good, they die young." I think that song may have some truth to it. We were blessed to have them be a part of our lives and We will treasure each happy moment we spent with them. They will be greatly missed.