

STEPHEN GILSTRAP

I really never thought this day would come, but it did. You know, when faced with writing this I did what I think anyone would do: I worried about coming here and about what to write. I worried the most about seeing this man (Tommie Cole) face-to-face.

What happened to my brother cannot be helped, but this man can be helped. He is still alive. He can reflect on his actions and try to be a better person. That's what my mom tells me to do when I do something bad. I actually forgive this man for what he did. I've prayed for him. I'm not one to hold grudges for very long, just like my brother.

I have to grow up without Jeff now and that's a scary. When I was being bullied at school, my brother came to volunteer in the student store. My mom said if they saw I had a big brother looking out for me maybe they'd stop. The kids liked my brother and it helped for awhile, but after my brother died the bullying got worse. My friend Isaiah was being bullied too and he changed schools because of it. My brother was not there to help. When the kids said awful things about how my brother died it made me feel so bad. My mom tried changing my school, but I was feeling so bad by then it didn't seem to work. Finally my mom decided to home school me.

Sometimes I feel like my life has become a big jumbled mess. I don't know what to say to people and I don't know what they want me to say. I don't like to talk about my feelings or even think about them. I play Xbox lot because it helps me not think about it for awhile. I remember playing Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 2 with my brother and that's a really good memory for me. I wish I still had that game and I wish I still had my brother.

Home school is making things better, I think. I've met some really good friends that really seem to like me. That part is good. The part that isn't good is seeing my mom cry so much. It really hurts to miss someone as much as I miss my big brother. He should be here, but he can't be. I give my mom lots of hugs to make her feel better and I do my best to make her laugh like my brother did. I try to be a good son like my brother was.

What this man has done to me emotionally is unimaginable. What he has done to my mom is even worse. She used to cry every night just thinking about it. My brother's death has hit her the hardest. I think now she tries not to let me see her cry. When she does, I always give her a hug.

I said at his funeral service that I had big shoes to fill. That's kind of literal since he did have size 13 feet. I still think I have big shoes to fill. I wish I didn't have to.

I wish my brother was here.

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Sometimes I feel like my life has become a big jumbled mess. I don't... know what to say to people and I don't know what they want me to... I don't like to talk about my feelings or even think about them... I play... it helps me not think about it for awhile. I... I wish I still had... I wish I still had my brother.

Home school is working things better. I think I've... I really hate to... I miss someone as much as I miss my brother. He should be... I give my mom more hugs to make her feel... I wish I could be a good son like my brother was.