



“Sibling survivor grows from loss’

By [Rick Badie](#) | Thursday, November 22, 2007, 10:00 AM
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Often, they are the forgotten mourners - the brothers and sisters left on Earth to sort through a sibling's death.

After his older brother, Chris, died nearly 13 years ago, Scott Mastley looked long and hard for books that addressed surviving siblings. He found plenty of information on the grieving process, but nothing written by people who had experienced what he was going through.

So in 1998, Mastley wrote and self-published his own book, “Surviving a Sibling: Discovering Life After Loss.” It deals with real-life examples (Mastley's and others') and includes surveys conducted on bereaved siblings and parents. The 16 chapters and 213 pages also include information on counseling and sibling support groups.

On Dec. 5, 1994, Chris Mastley, then 27, was killed in a traffic accident in Alabama. He was a pharmaceutical salesperson en route to a hospital in Dothan. He ran a stop sign and was hit by a car crossing the intersection.

These two brothers were close. When both were enrolled at Vanderbilt University, they pledged the same fraternity, Phi Kappa Psi. Chris earned a bachelor's degree in economics; Scott transferred to the University of Georgia, where he earned undergrad and master's degrees.

Shortly before Chris died, he'd gotten a job in Atlanta and had big plans: Buy a house. Marry his sweetheart. Rent a room to his little brother, his one and only sibling.

“He was a great, great big brother,” said Mastley, who lives in Suwanee.

Today, Mastley oversees Mastley Performance Group, a consulting firm in Duluth that specializes in human resources and safety. The married father of two girls also speaks to sibling support groups in metro Atlanta.

Of all the chapters in the book, Mastley says Chapter No. 5 - “Whys and What Ifs” - resonates with readers the most. It deals with questions grieving siblings often ask themselves, the psychological punishment they inflict.

“That's what drives people insane,” Mastley, 38, said.

For example, Mastley kept asking himself why Chris ran the stop sign; why he didn't take a different route to the hospital. He addresses this in his book.

“It's OK to wonder, but it is unhealthy to burden myself with questions that have no ultimate answers,” he wrote. “It is up to me to decide what I believe and to accept the answers that I can live with.”

Mastley hopes the book empowers others to move on, to keep living. He knows what it's like to live with the grief, the pain, the dread that, if allowed, can suffocate on days like today, Thanksgiving.

In the book's conclusion, Mastley says he tells himself every morning that he's healthy, happy and energetic.

Some days, he writes, it's even true.

Scott Mastley will speak at 7 p.m. Dec. 1 at a candlelight remembrance ceremony at First Christian Church of Atlanta, hosted by the Compassionate Friends of Atlanta. Details: <http://www.tcfatlanta.org>. For more information on Mastley, visit “<http://www.survivingasibling.com>.”

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