



Jeroen, Leen and Mieke

My Brother Jeroen

One day my dad mentioned to my pregnant mom: “I would like to have a son with red hair”. She looked at him and said, “ And you think you can place an order?” My parents and I lived above the bookstore at the time. Jeroen arrived on July 23rd 1972 with beautiful red hair and a red face from screaming very loud! The old fashioned nurse made a judgmental comment to my parents: “You both have dark hair and his is red? Quickly my dad responded “I ordered it”.

Me, being the first born, was used to getting all the attention. That all changed instantly when my brother was born. Suddenly there was another child and he was receiving the majority of the attention, as all new babies do. I was extremely envious! My dad did everything he could to give us the same. Feeding us at the same time and giving us both equal attention, but the green monster took over anyway.

My brother is one of those unique creative people that found a way to live with his heart open. Not easy to do in a world that doesn't appreciate that. Always creating purely from his heart. He is an inventor, and multi-talented artist. As a child he developed many skills. He invented many gadgets to solve life's obstacles. He has made beautiful jewelry pieces, exquisite paintings, lavish dream catchers and other very unique art pieces. He is always building, designing or creating something.

Jeroen is a natural born musician. He always had a profound sense of rhythm. As a young boy his whole body moved gracefully. I truly loved that about him. He was adorable and very sensitive.

Taking after our blind aunt Caecilia, it didn't take Jeroen long to express his feelings through music.

Our piano became an extension of himself and soon he was pouring his soul into the songs he played. He attended music school twice, first at age 7 and again at age 16. Each time he rejected the stifling structure of those regimented forms of expression. He chose to learn to play music on his own. He still doesn't read music, he plays intuitively from his heart.

Our father spend a lot of time listening quietly to his young son learning to play the piano. He never hindered but sometimes he gave my brother supportive guidance. Ones he mentioned that when we are practicing something there often comes a point where a mistake is made and we want to start over. We practice the beginning very well but we don't advance beyond the mistake. He advised him to just keep playing. My brother took this advice to heart and used it to his advantage. He learned to look at mistakes as opportunities to improvise and found himself playing phenomenal songs. He always plays unique compositions, no two the same. This pure emanation beyond the mind allows his authentic feelings to come through.

A major family episode occurred when I was nineteen. I happened to overhear my dad on the phone. I immediately sensed in his voice something serious was going on. He was talking to my brother and assured him that he was always welcome at home no matter what the situation was. Oh oh....,I assumed in that moment that my brother, at age seventeen, had divulged a unplanned pregnancy. Why else would he fear to come home? I queried my dad about the call. My sister who was privy to the situation told me they would tell me later. In no way was I going to wait! I pressed to know right then. Delicately my dad explained to me that my brother revealed he was gay and that he didn't dare to come home. I didn't see this one coming. I relaxed, realizing that my assumption was off. I could easily accept that he was gay and knew that the world would have to accept that as well. My dad was not surprised at my response but had no idea how he was going to tell my mom. He knew that my mom wouldn't understand or accept easily what it meant. Realizing his dilemma I

immediately said not to worry. I would tell her and I would do it right then. I called her into the kitchen and explained what just occurred. It wasn't easy for her because she didn't know how to integrate this rather unexpected revelation.

In a recent conversation with my brother talking about his coming out, I learned 2 unpleasant things. The morning of the phone conversation at school, a bully discovered my brother was gay and in no time the whole school new about it. He was put on the spot and humiliated in front of everyone. He wanted to run away. He called my dad to tell him that he was to ashamed to come home.

Also my brother shared that before he came out I was always judging his effeminate way and called him a janet which is Dutch for faggot. After that phone call it stopped. I feel the deep pain he must have felt. Being bullied at school is very painful in itself but being mocked by someone you love and look up to is almost unbearable. This could have damaged his self esteem and life forever!

(I apologize to you Jeroen for being so unconscious and unaware of how deeply this must have hurt you.)

Jeroen has informed me that his coming out in one day, at school and at home, truly saved his life. He wouldn't have dared to share this deeply personal truth if some event hadn't intervened like that. He would have to maintain one big secret lie possibly including a false relationship with wife and kids. He would never be able to divulge his true feelings and live a life with integrity and honesty.

In 2014 Jeroen met Filip and they soon formed a bond that provided support, intimacy and mutual understanding for all their undertakings. In August 2015 they joined in ceremony to become life partners.

One of Jeroen's dreams is to travel throughout Europe with Filip and play piano in the cathedrals and churches. The acoustics are exceptional. He once played in a cathedral in Gent and it truly added another dimension to the experience.

I find it fascinating that a member of the human race can only find the freedom to be who they truly are when their unique life complexities received a medical label.

My brother recently became diagnosed with asperger autism.

For Jeroen life in this culture is challenging. The parameters of society that are designed to gauge a person mentally, social and professionally are inadequate to designate his person.

His only way to escape this world of many dualistic expectations was to create beauty in art and music.

My mom didn't always know how to respond to him because he was extraordinary. She was relieved with the diagnoses and can now understand and accept his way of being.

In 2003 Jeroen found companionship in Jehaan, his Maltese dog. For 11 years Jeroen and Jehaan were inseparable. This is a song my brother performed 5 days after his dog passed away. Filip recorded this beautiful melody for all of us to enjoy.

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=sJAcpzI8vI8>

I am grateful to have a brother with whom I can communicate truthfully about our deeper truths and experiences. I love having Jeroen as my brother.

