

## Sherry Hensley Babic

The Lord blessed me with many comforts when I was born in 1954. Our home overlooking the beautiful Nolichucky River was new, built by my thirty-year-old father. Directly South, right out the front door, was the ever-changing beauty of the Appalachian Mountains. What a magnificent place to live! Above all the material things we possessed, was the love of my life, my eleven-year-old brother Steve. I don't remember what I called him when I was a baby, but I'm sure it was something funny. Growing up with Steve was always fun. Ted was 18 months older than I was and Steve became our baby sitter and mom's assistant when it came to changing diapers and feeding babies. My early memories are of a warm and loving family that went everywhere together and did fun things like cook hot-dogs in the living room fireplace. Steve was a great baby sitter and would invent games for us and let us cook in moms' kitchen when she and dad were out. When I was about five years old, Steve would have been around sixteen, it was very important to have a car in order to get dates. Steve dressed and combed his hair like Elvis. He always had a lot of girlfriends, but the main three I can remember were Margie, Tootie and Meryl. He was always either on the phone with one of them or begging my parents for our Chevy station wagon to go see one of them. Steve enjoyed his teen years. He was always telling us stories, cooking for us, or driving us around in his old white Ford named *White Lightning* – his first car. Steve also had a motorcycle and even a moped at one time. Seems he was always tinkering with or rebuilding some kind of engine all the time. Steve taught me, Ted and cousin Jr. to play poker – much to moms' dismay. He would let us listen to his Elvis records and we would run around the room like wild Indians as he and cousins Jim, Margaret Ann, Wanda, and Jeanne danced and drank Pepsi's. Steve and Jim would sing Elvis songs and the girls would squeal. Our lives were rich and full of laughter. Our days as a family were filled with fishing trips to the lake, visiting our Grandmothers, and picnicking down by the banks of the river.

Most of my childhood memories about Steve are from the stories we heard time and time again. When something funny happened to one of us, mom and dad would have to repeat it over and over to all the relatives in the family, so we got to hear the stories so often that they were ingrained in our minds. Dad loved to tell the story about Steve going duck hunting. He had shot a big duck, and it floated toward the island. The duck was out in the water, just beyond reach, and Steve was going to have to wade out to get it. He didn't want to get his pants wet and then have to walk home in wet pants (there was snow on the ground) so he took his pants off and laid them across a big limb. He still couldn't get the duck by wading, so he reached behind him and got a limb to extend his reach to the dead duck. In doing this, the limb he picked up was the one holding his pants..... and in his concentration on retrieving the duck, his pants fell off the limb and into the river. He came out of the freezing water only to find his pants missing. Steve was well aware that dad was a practical joker, and he thought

dad had heard the shot and came to see what he had. Steve also thought that dad took his pants, trying to play a trick on him. Steve went storming up to the house (pantless) carrying his duck. He was furious! Mom and dad were just sitting there, slightly amused, (things like this happened at our house quite often) and waited for an explanation. After Steve warmed up a bit and calmed down, the mystery of the missing pants was solved. I heard this story a million times when I was growing up, and dad still loves to tell it and after all these years it's still funny.

In 1964 our mom discovered that she had a rare liver cancer. Steve had just joined the Air Force, working on his dream of learning to fly. Mom was given 6 months to live and according to the experts, we should all prepare ourselves for the inevitable. Steve took an early leave from the military to be home with mom and us. It was a bleak time for us all. Gone were the sun-filled days of the simple life on the farm that we had grown accustomed to. Mom had a tremendous amount of faith, and prayed hard to God for Him to allow her to live long enough to "see us kids raised." Steve was at her side night and day, helping in any way that he could. He cleaned house, helped cook meals, and drove Ted and me to music lessons at Mrs. Warricks house. Moms' illness brought us closer together in some ways, and we were happy to spend more time with Steve, but we were sad that she was so ill. He would take her to Philadelphia for her treatments, sometimes driving all night. He was amazing. I remember one time, around Christmas, when mom was too sick to go shopping for gifts, but she really wanted to get out. Steve borrowed a wheelchair from the nursing home and took her! A photographer from the newspaper took her picture. I was embarrassed to see her picture in the paper sitting in a wheelchair, but there in the back, holding on to the chair and looking very proud to be there, was Steve. I was too young and stupid to realize how meaningful that gesture was, but Steve wasn't. I still have a copy of that picture.

Steve was always trying to teach us "kids" a lesson. Almost all his lessons had a moral and all his stories had a point. One time we were in Aunt Mamie's yard playing badminton with Jr. and Ted. I was goofing off and accidentally broke the racket. I was scared that Uncle Clifford would give me a spanking for being so careless. I started crying and Steve took me over to the swings and told me a story about a battle. He told me that there was a knight, fighting a big battle. He had broken his sword but he didn't give up, the knight kept fighting and fighting. The broken sword made the knight fiercer, which helped him win the battle. So with determination and the drying of tears, we continued to play the game.

It's true that Steve's stories could fill a book. I have gotten many great and funny stories from Steve's friends all over the country. Family members have sent me some really wonderful memories also. Steve taught all of us to fly; he even soloed Julie, Atticus and Ben. He was the best pilot I have ever flown with, and I have heard that from many people, including airline captains!