

## Down By The Berry Patch

### "Liar"

**Rita Luks**

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Kids shouldn't be worrying about death. Especially one that wasn't going to happen. My challenge as big sister was to help Bruce understand that Father Cahill wasn't going to die. I told him he might have heard someone say that but just because they said so didn't make it true.



"They don't know what they were talking about. Maybe they just don't know that sometimes people don't die from cancer. Especially priests. Practically everybody in town is saying that Father Cahill is really a saint because he's such a good person. He even likes people who aren't Catholics. He's the chaplain for the fire department. If you want to listen to other people, that's the kind of thing you should listen to. If enough people pray for Father, God will listen to their prayers and let him live. I know people who are Lutherans, Methodists, and Moravians who are praying for him besides all the Catholics who are praying for him. He isn't going to die."

"You lie. You told me the same thing when Sport died."

That happened years before when our dog ate poison meat a man in town said he put out to kill a wild animal that was hanging around his place. Sport was lying beside the furnace down the basement, stretched out on his side with his four legs straight out in front of him. The veterinarian said there wasn't anything he could do for him. Bruce was crying but he calmed down when I told him Sport would be fine and we knelt together beside our dog stroking his shiny coat. Besides, I really thought he might get better. He was just lying there sleeping so calmly. I didn't lie. Why would he even think that and how could he compare a dog to our priest?

Father Cahill died. I really didn't believe he would. I didn't think about what Bruce said about my being a liar for a long time. Not until Daddy died.

Mother and I were doing dishes together on Christmas Eve and I told her I was glad Daddy was getting better and looking so good since his heart attack. She told me he really wasn't getting better. He was getting worse. His health was extremely bad. The next few days I was very angry with her for saying such a terrible thing. Four days later he was dead. I realized Mother tried to protect me with her honesty. That's when I thought about what Bruce said again.

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Photo Caption: Bruce Liberacki

Years after Daddy died, one of my third grade students was in a tragic automobile accident. He was on the critical list for weeks. Every day my students would ask, "Is Matt going to live?" and I would tell them the doctors and nurses were doing everything they could to help him get better but they didn't know yet if he was going to live. Parents began to call me at home demanding that I tell their children he was going to be just fine. I realized it would be wrong to do that. Wanting something to be a certain way didn't make it so. Matt lost his sight in one eye but eventually recovered enough to come back to school. I knew I had handled the situation with honesty.

Twenty years later Bruce asked me if I thought he should have heart by-pass surgery. I was ready, as usual, with my big sister advice. "Go for it! This is your chance for a long lifetime. Just think how different things would have been if that kind of surgery had been available for Daddy? This is your chance to be here for your kids and Sherry. It is absolutely the best thing that could happen for you."

While Bruce was in the hospital Sherry and Chad stayed at our house. Sherry spent many hours at the hospital and Chad spent many hours running around with Aunt Rita looking at carpet samples. I knew he was worried about his Dad so I tried to keep him busy. We were just pulling into Sear's parking lot and he was wishing out loud that he were old enough to go visit his Dad at the hospital. Next he was telling me he didn't want his Dad to die. Bruce had come through the surgery with no difficulty and would be home, ahead of schedule in a couple days. This time I had my facts straight and didn't just let my heart speak for me. I reassured him that his Dad would be home soon and he didn't need to worry about him dying.

Chad spent the next afternoon printing note cards with his cousin Beth. That same evening his Dad died.

Using one of his handmade cards, Chad wrote a note to Bruce and slipped it into his Dad's pocket at the funeral home. I never read the note but I'm sure an eight-year-old would have written I LOVE YOU DAD. LOVE, CHAD. In my worst nightmare he wrote, AUNT RITA LIED TO BOTH OF US.