

Inner Sparks

*“If I was offered for life to be perfect,
it would be tempting, but I would decline ...
for life would no longer teach me anything.”*

— AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Life *isn't* always perfect.

It was 6:30 A.M. on August 10, 1985. Steve and I had been married only eight days, and were staying at Mom's house overnight. Mom came into our bedroom to wake us, saying in an eerily calm voice that the sheriff had just called. There was a fire at the home farm, the house that had been in our family for three generations and the home in which I'd been raised.

My brother Mike was living there.

In a stupor, we drove to the farm. As we came up the driveway we saw flames engulfing the house. There was nothing we could do except watch. Within two hours the sheriff walked solemnly across the yard to tell us that they had found my brother just three feet from the front door of the house.

I fell to my knees. He was twenty-eight years old. Twenty-eight. And just like that, my big brother was gone. No more hugs, no more dancing together, no more “Hey, Sis!” as he walked in the door with a big smile.

I was devastated. I was twenty-six years old and, as the finality of Mike's death sunk in, I was suddenly and profoundly aware of my mortality. His death made two things painfully clear to me. Life isn't perfect and our lives are short.

At the time I wasn't thankful for this searing insight. Mike's death was a tragedy and the fact that life was imperfect and *short* was a curse. His death was a meaningless waste that didn't make sense. For a long time I searched for reasons and found none. I was angry.

But over the years life has taught me this: Mike's death was one of my greatest gifts. His life enriched mine beyond measure. It became a turning

point in my life, a catalyst for me to seize the day and live life fully *now*. Mike gave me a reason to go for my dreams.

In the following pages I share a collection of lessons I've learned along the way. But this is not a standard memoir. These short stories are simply based on my experiences, are not necessarily chronological, and not always flattering. But I hope they will give you what they gave me: the courage to live life more fully, with more meaning and intent. I hope that your fire will be stirred and you'll feel the flame of determination to go for your dreams.

Life *isn't* always perfect, but it is overflowing with teachings.

