



Finding Rainbows

Through My Sister's Depression

By Sherry Krueger & Kristi Barth

Photography by
Lois Smith

Book Design by
Kim Goldberg

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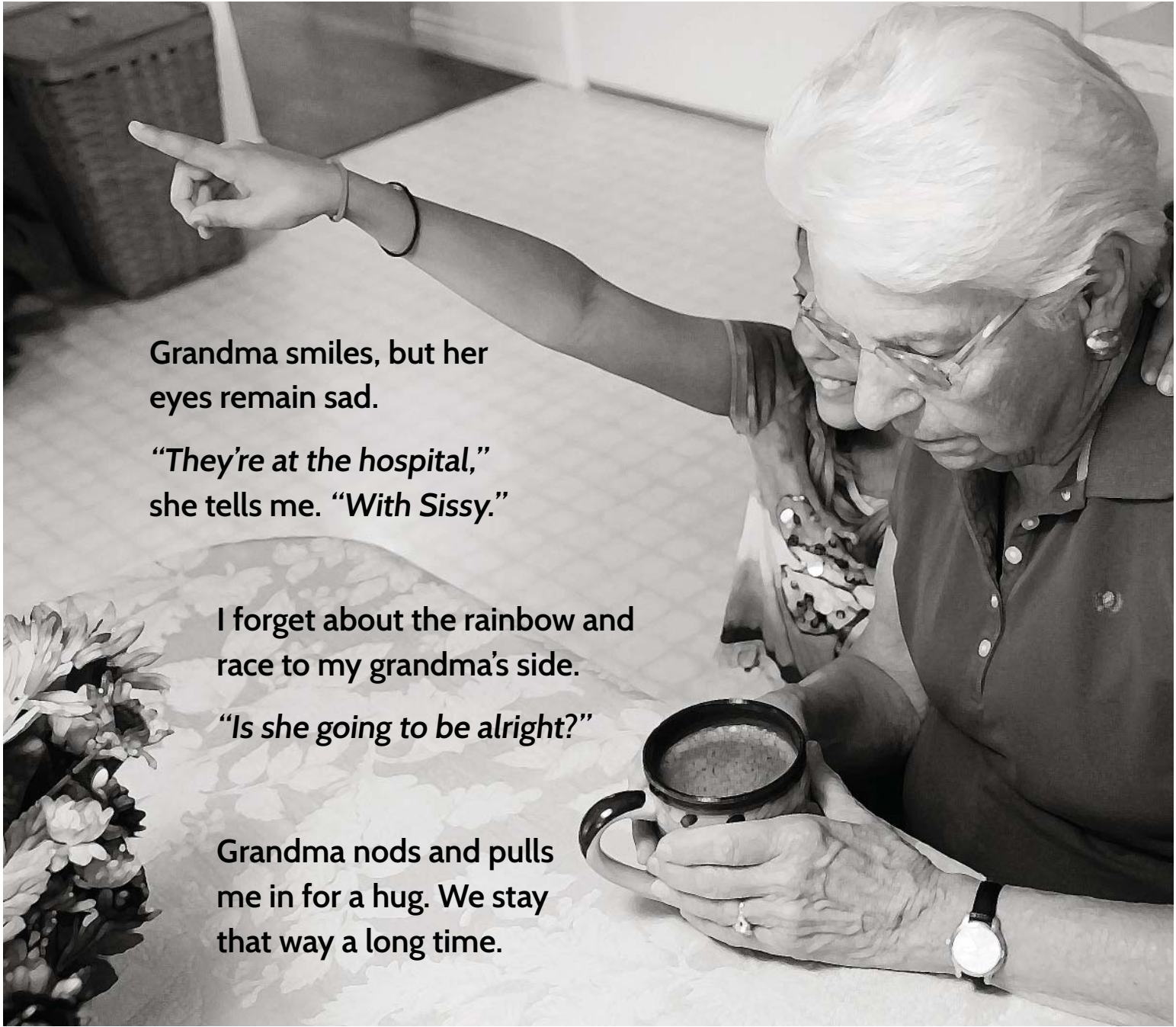
*With special thanks to Hannah, Amy and Virgil Adderly,
Reagan Warner, Margie Vannoy and Annabelle Hauss.*

It starts the day I see a double rainbow. I run to show my sister, but her room is empty. The whole house is empty, except for the kitchen where my grandma sits in the quiet.

“Where is everyone?”

I ask as I point to the window.

“There’s a rainbow outside.”



Grandma smiles, but her
eyes remain sad.

*"They're at the hospital,"
she tells me. "With Sissy."*

I forget about the rainbow and
race to my grandma's side.

"Is she going to be alright?"

Grandma nods and pulls
me in for a hug. We stay
that way a long time.




When mom and dad come home, they walk over to the couch and place soft kisses on my forehead. "Where's Sissy?" I ask, suddenly awake.

“She’s in the hospital,” dad says in a tired voice. He takes my hand. “Your sister has a sickness called depression. Depression is a very painful sickness and it makes people feel sad. Sometimes it makes them feel so sad they try to hurt themselves.”

My eyes get wide. “Did Sissy try to hurt herself?”

Dad nods, but he tells me she’s okay. “She’s staying at the hospital for a few days so the medication, counseling and doctors can help her feel better.”

A person wearing a grey hoodie and a white ribbed vest is seen from behind, looking towards a young girl. The girl is standing on a porch, smiling, and holding up a colorful drawing of a rainbow, flowers, and a tree. She is wearing a pink shirt, black shorts, and black sneakers. The background shows a dark doorway and some foliage.

I spend the week drawing pictures for her. I draw as many happy things I can think of, and I hang them in her room.

As soon as I hear the car, I run out to meet her.

“Hey, Sissy,” I yell as I run toward her. I can feel my smile meet my ears. Sissy returns my smile with a small one of her own. I want to hug her, but she enters the house and shuts the door.

Tears flood my eyes. Mom bends down and brushes the hair from my face. She says in a soft voice, “Your sister loves you very much, but she’s hurting so much she can’t show you right now.”

“Didn’t the hospital make her better?”


Mom looks deeply into my eyes. “Sometimes it takes a long time for a person with depression to feel better. We just have to give her time.” I look at my sister’s window and wonder how long it will take.

The next few days I go to school and come home to find Sissy rolled up in a blanket on the floor. Her eyes are red and she's not saying anything. I sit beside her and put my hand on her leg. *"Want to do something?"* I ask. She doesn't even look at me when she shakes her head no.



Grandma catches my eye. She whispers, *“Depression can make someone so sad they have a hard time being with other people, even people they love.”* Then she puts her arm around me. *“Sissy may cry a lot, sleep more than usual and want to be alone. But she still loves you, even if she doesn’t feel like doing anything right now.”*

“I know,” I say as she hugs me, but my heart feels heavy. Grandma and I pray for Sissy and our family. I feel better. I go back and sit by my sister’s side. *“That’s okay,”* I tell her. *“We can do something another time.”*



Soon Sissy is starting school again. It feels good to see her walk down to breakfast. Dad winks at me. *"I think she's getting better,"* he tells me.

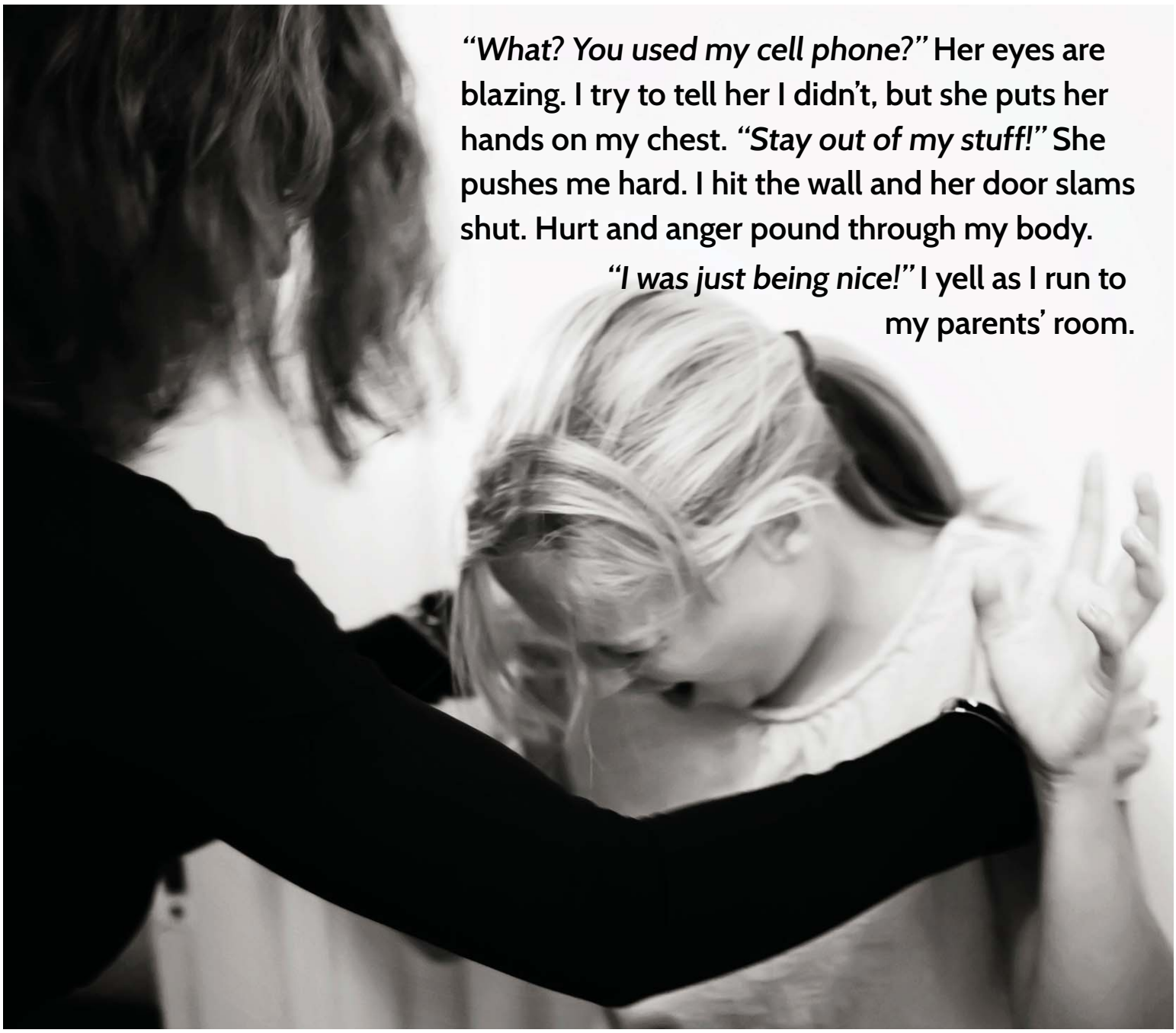
"I think so, too" I say.

We high five.

Slowly our house starts to feel normal again, and we spend our days going to work and school. In the evening, I do my homework while Sissy texts quietly in the corner. Mom and dad look at her and then at each other. They raise their eyebrows and it makes me smile. I feel happy.

Until the day I hear Sissy yelling at me from her bedroom. *“Stay out of my room, brat!”* My heart jumps and starts beating in my ears. I run to her doorway and explain.

“I was just putting your cell phone away.”



“What? You used my cell phone?” Her eyes are blazing. I try to tell her I didn’t, but she puts her hands on my chest. ***“Stay out of my stuff!”*** She pushes me hard. I hit the wall and her door slams shut. Hurt and anger pound through my body.

“I was just being nice!” I yell as I run to my parents’ room.

Mom wraps her blanket around me, and dad leaves to talk with Sissy. I try to stop crying, but the tears keep spilling over.

"That was scary, wasn't it?" she asks. I nod my head.

"Why is she so angry with me?"



“Oh, baby,” mom says as she holds me tight. “Sissy’s not angry with you and she doesn’t mean to hurt you. She’s just frustrated because the pain she feels won’t go away. Her frustration sounds like anger.”

“But she pushed me.”

Mom’s eyes tear up. “That was wrong, and dad is talking to her about that. When someone has depression, it affects their brain, which controls their thoughts, feelings and actions. It can make them do things they wouldn’t normally do when they are well.”

"I don't like depression," I tell her.

"Me neither," she says.

I look at her. "Will I get sick like Sissy?"

Mom reassures me, "Just because your sister has it doesn't mean you will. You can't catch it like a cold."

I think about that for awhile. "Good," I say, "but isn't Sissy taking medicine like you do for a cold?"

She thinks about that and then explains that for some people this medicine helps the brain send the right messages so they don't feel so sad all of the time.




The next morning Sissy walks into my bedroom and sits on my bed. *“Sorry,”* she says, *“I didn’t mean to hurt you. I’m just a little stressed out.”* She wraps both arms around herself and begins to rock back and forth. That’s when I notice some funny marks on her arm. They are red and swollen, and they look like they hurt.

“Sissy, what happened?” I say pointing.

She quickly pulls her sleeve back down.

“Nothing. It’s just a little scratch.”

“Did you show mom?”



“No,” she tells me, “And don’t say anything, either. You’ll just make mom upset.”

We sit together on the bed and play Wii, but I can’t stop thinking about Sissy’s arm.

So I say something to mom, and I can tell by a door slamming that Sissy is not happy. I can hear mom sighing, and when dad comes home they spend the evening whispering.

Dad walks over and kneels in front of me. *“Remember when I told you that depression may make people try to hurt themselves?”* I nod. *“That’s why there are marks on Sissy’s arm,”* he says.

“Will she have to go back to the hospital?”
I wonder.

Dad clears his throat. *“No, she’s going to be alright.”* He reaches out and tousles my hair. *“Thanks for letting us know, kiddo. You’re a good sister.”* His words are nice, but down inside I’m feeling a little guilty.



I'm still feeling funny when I wake up later that night and hear sounds coming from Sissy's room.

I slip out of bed just in time to see her sneak down the hall and out the front door. I run after her. "*Hey,*" I say as I open the door, but it's too late. Sissy has already gotten into a car and driven away.

Mom and dad are easy to wake up, and our house explodes with activity. *"Where could she have gone?"* mom cries. She picks up the phone and starts dialing.



Dad grabs his keys and says, *"I'll go check the park."* He stops just long enough to tell me to go back to bed.

I bury myself with covers, but my mind keeps thinking about Sissy. Where is she? Is she okay? Soon my eyes are so heavy even worries can't keep them open.



In the morning I hear voices coming from the living room.
“We were so worried about you,” I hear mom say.
“Don’t you know how dangerous that was?” dad adds.

I hear my sister say it was no big deal. She tells my parents to chill. My eyes grow wide and I hop out of bed and get dressed. As I walk toward the living room, everyone is talking at once. I can only understand a few words: drinking...cigarettes...grounded. Sissy stomps past me. *"Tattle-tale,"* she whispers and slams her door. Mom and dad look at me with tired eyes.

"Ready for school?" dad asks. I shrug.

"What about Sissy?" We all look at her closed door.

"She's not going to school today," mom says,

"Grandma will stay with her." There's a long pause.

Then we leave. My tummy growls, and mom and dad don't even realize we haven't had breakfast yet.

The next few weeks are filled with figuring out how to help Sissy. Dad comes home from work, and mom meets him at the door. They talk quietly and their faces look worried. I try not to add to their stress, but it's hard. I want things back to the way they used to be. I walk to my mom in the kitchen.

"Can we go to a movie, mom?"

She stops chopping vegetables and looks at me. *“We can’t today because we have a family therapy session for Sissy.”*



“What about afterwards?” I ask hopefully.

She shakes her head. *“Sissy has a big project due tomorrow.”* I feel my hopes drop, as well as my bottom lip.

“You’re always doing stuff with Sissy. Do you love her more than me?”

Mom bends down. *“Of course not, baby,”* she says. She gives me a hug. *“Dad and I are just trying to help Sissy get healthy as soon as possible. We want things to be okay again.”*

I hug her back. *“So do I,”* I say.



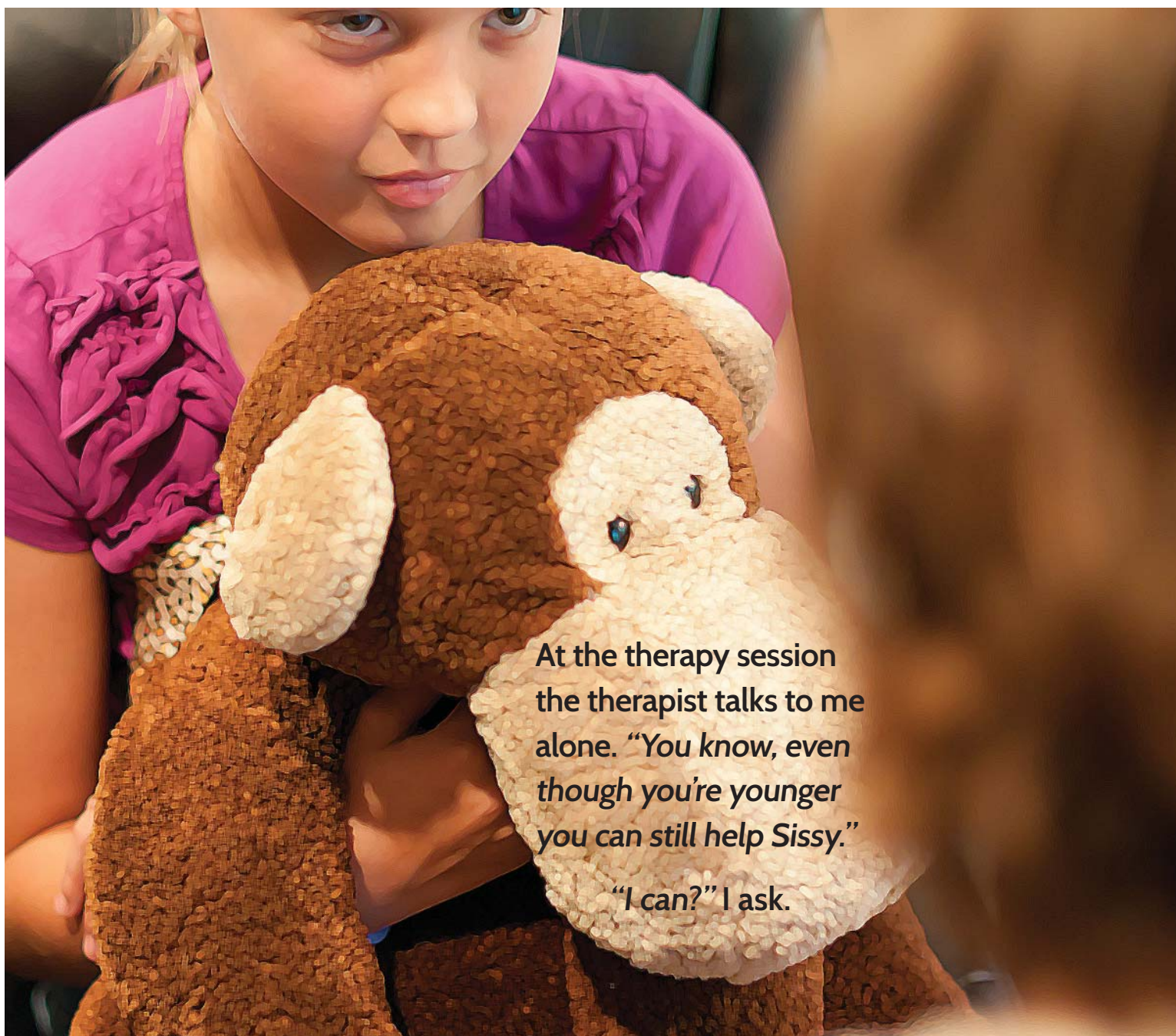
“We want you to be healthy and happy, too,” she says.

“Do you need us to spend more time with you?”

I nod my head yes.

“Can we go to a movie tomorrow?” she asks. A smile comes to my face and I dance around the kitchen.

“Sure,” I say.



At the therapy session
the therapist talks to me
alone. *"You know, even
though you're younger
you can still help Sissy."*

"I can?" I ask.

“Sure,” the therapist says. “One of the best things you can do is ask Sissy to join you in doing things that are physical, such as playing basketball. Exercise helps people with depression feel better. What kinds of things do you and Sissy like to do?”

“Ride our bikes at the park.” I answer.

“That would be a great thing for Sissy to do,” the therapist says. “You can also find little ways to show Sissy that you love and care about her. You can tell her that you will always love her and believe in her. It might not take all of her pain away, but it will make her feel better.” The therapist looks me in the eyes and smiles. “Sissy will get better, and with your help she will know that she is not alone.”

The next day I think about the therapist's talk and walk into Sissy's room. "*What do you want, bug?*" she asks.

"Do you want to go for a ride at the park?" I look up at her. Sissy stops brushing her hair and looks at me. I give her a small smile.

"Sure," she says. A warm feeling enters my heart and grows up to my smile.



*"I love you, Sissy,"
I say.*

*Her eyes get tears.
"I love you, too," she says.*



We grab our bikes, and I take one last look at our house. A rainbow fills the sky overhead. “*Look,*” I tell Sissy, “*a rainbow.*”

She stops and turns. We look at it for awhile. “*I like rainbows,*” she sighs.

“*Me, too,*” I say and look at her. We both smile.

“Today is a good day,” she says. I nod. “I’m not so sure about tomorrow, though,” she looks down at the ground for a second. Then she adds, “But I’m working hard at having more good days.”

Before I can reply, she gives me a silly smile and slaps my back saying, *“Tag, you’re it!”*

I quickly turn and start peddling after her.

Also by Sherry Krueger and Kristi Barth *Jared's Journal* as seen here.



Providing resources and encouragement to teens
and their families affected by depression.

teensfindinghope.org



Finding Rainbows Through My Sister's Depression
tells the story of a young girl as she struggles to understand
her sister's illness and why it's changing their relationship.

She just wants things to go
back to the way they were.

This book is published by Teens Finding Hope, Inc., a non-profit organization focused on providing resources and encouragement to teens and families affected by depression.

Also published by Teens Finding Hope:

Jared's Journal written specifically for teens who may be experiencing sadness and/or depression issues.

The authors, Sherry Krueger and Kristi Barth, have experienced how depression affects families, as they both have children struggling with this illness. They share these stories to help others know they are not alone, there is help, and there is hope.



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