

Promise Not to Tell

WRITTEN BY GABI FITZGIBBON, AGE 11, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

ILLUSTRATED BY KATIE SWEENEY, AGE 13, WOONGARRAH, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA
AND TORI-ANNE HUNTER, AGE 13, WYONG, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

I've got a secret. If you promise not to tell anyone, I will tell you. I've never told anybody this, ever, although I am busting to tell somebody.

Well, here goes. My sister visits me in my room. The strange part is, she has been dead for fourteen years. Up until nine months ago, I had never met her before. But now, that has all changed ...

It was a sunny day in Camden when Elizabeth decided to be born. It was 3:15pm on a Thursday afternoon when my mum rang up my Dad (who was at work at the time) to tell him to meet her at the hospital. Now, I won't go into the details, but Elizabeth died due to complications through her birth.

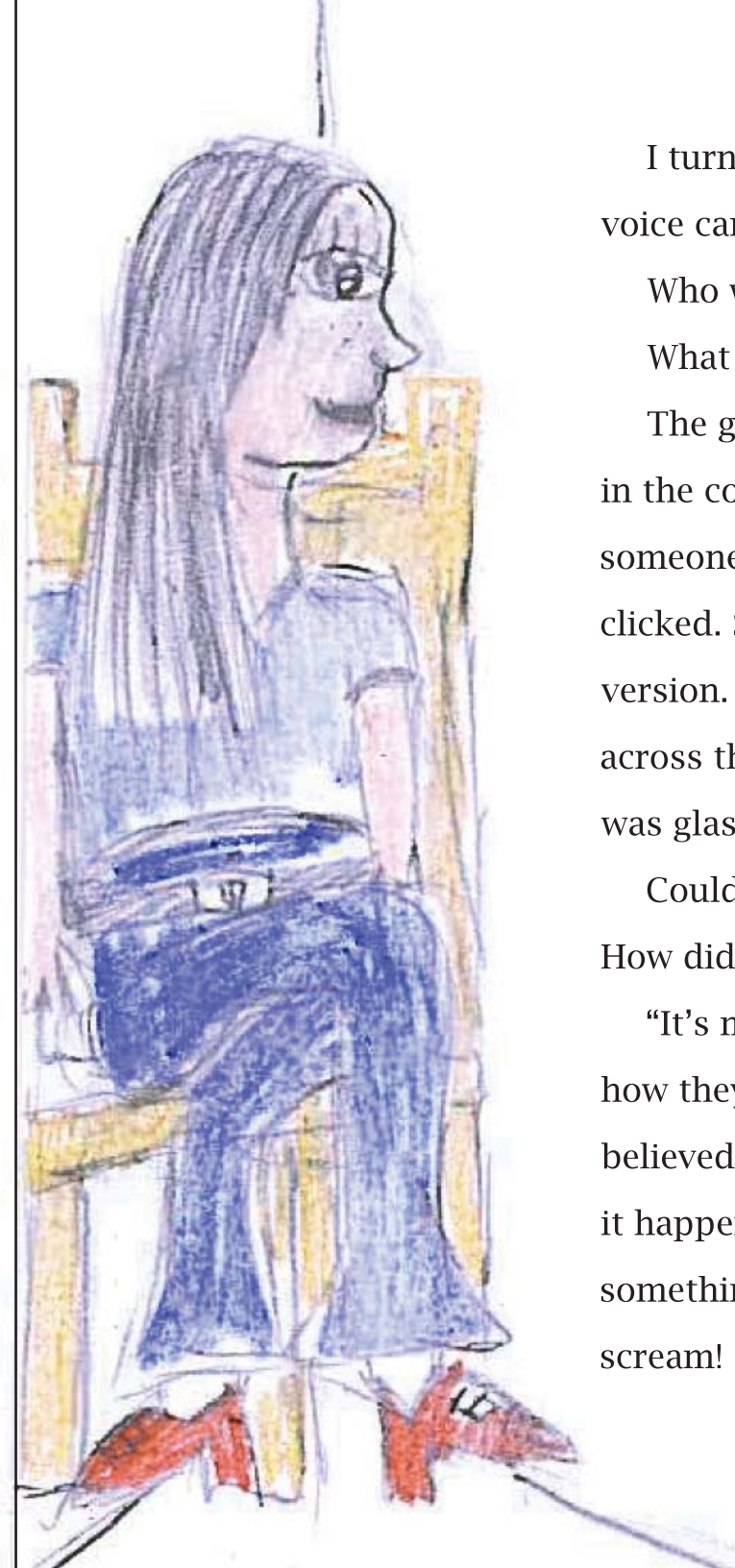
We celebrate her birthday on the second of May by sending balloons up to heaven. We stand on the bridge at home that Dad built and we sing at the top of our voices "Happy Birthday." Then we spend time in her garden that we made for her, which is so beautiful with the baby pink camellias that bloom every May. That is where we feel we are most close to Elizabeth, that was up until now...

The funeral was obviously a very bleak day for my parents. They said the ceremony lasted for what seemed like forever. At times I look back into her album covered in the material from my mum's engagement dress. Mum and Dad put this album together as a memory for all of us to share. It is obviously called Elizabeth's album. I often look at all of the photos and cards addressed to my Mum and Dad with immense sympathy for them and sadness that Elizabeth Majella is not here with us, that was up until now...

I enjoy being the big sister down here, but all of us know that we have a big sister up in heaven to support us.

Today was a long day, it dragged on and on, for most of the day I just sat there watching the second hand on the clock go round and round and round. I hadn't been myself today, I just needed a break. "I'll just go to my room and hope for a better day tomorrow," I said to myself. Upstairs I was thinking that no one had experienced the bad day I had had and therefore no one understood. But I then heard this voice say, "I do, I understand."

I was just about to yell at my sister to get lost, to get out of my room (what would she know, she doesn't have to juggle high school, jobs round the house and social issues), when I realized it was an older voice. My first thought was that it was my mum coming to kiss me goodnight, for she too had experienced a long day and I think she also wanted to curl up in bed. But boy was I wrong.



I turned to look in the direction where the voice came from... And that is when I saw her.

Who was she?

What was she doing here?

The girl was sitting crossed legged on a chair in the corner. She reminded me so much of someone but I couldn't think who, and then it clicked. She looked exactly like me, but an older version. She had long brown hair and freckles across the nose. The only thing she didn't have was glasses.

Could it be, no of course not... "Who are you? How did you get into my room?"

"It's me Gabi, its Elizabeth." (Well you know how they say your legs go wobbly? Well, I never believed them up until that moment but trust me, it happened.) I was about to run out the door but something stopped me. I thought maybe I should scream! Isn't that what people do when they see

a ghost? But nothing came out.

So I did what every girl would do in such a situation... I burst into tears. And that was when she stood up and hugged me. She hugged me like I had never been hugged before. It seemed like that hug lasted forever and we didn't say a word. We didn't need to - we were sisters.

Our first conversation we shared was amazing. I cried (again). We talked for hours nonstop. I told her everything, all my secrets, everything. She understood me. She made me feel so much better. After an enormous amount of time, she turned to leave. I was disappointed, although I did make her promise to come back. She promised. That night I fell asleep with ease. I felt so much better and had the best sleep ever.

The next morning I woke up feeling great. I sang and danced around all morning.

The whole day I couldn't stop thinking about her. I got in trouble from Mr Pratt in DNT for not paying attention. I just couldn't stop thinking about her. I also got in trouble from Miss Griffiths in Math for doodling in my book. She was just so familiar (Elizabeth, not Miss Griffiths). She had long brown hair, freckles and everything. Ohhhh, that's right, she didn't wear glasses. Why? If she was just an older version of me why didn't she wear glasses?

Oh I know, how could I have forgotten that? No dead person would wear

glasses because everything is perfect in heaven.

That night, I couldn't wait to go to bed and by the time the clock read 7:30 I couldn't bear it anymore. I made myself a cup of tea, kissed Mum and Dad goodnight and sprinted up to bed. Mum and Dad were very puzzled that they didn't have to argue with me to get me to bed.



Then I waited... and waited... and waited. But she didn't come. It was then I realized of - course she wouldn't come. Lucky, I hadn't told anyone. It was just a really, really, really silly dream. Like hello, she's been dead 14 years! How could she come to me?

A week on and I had completely convinced myself that it was a dream. I had also forgotten all about it. (Well at least I tried to!) It was a Friday evening, 22 degrees and raining. I went to bed at 10:00 p.m. only to find Elizabeth in my room. It was sooooo unexpected! She said she had missed me and then began to tell me all about heaven. It was amazing. She told me about the stunning gardens, the organized and clean cities and the fantastic clothes. Heaven seemed perfect, well I knew it was but she just confirmed it for me. We talked for hours and then again it was time for her to leave. Again she promised to come back. I was exhilarated. Elizabeth does things for me, too. Like for instance, one day I came home from school and my room was tidy. I went downstairs and thanked my mum but she gave me a puzzled expression. I knew then it must have been Elizabeth. She may have cleaned my room for me but that's not to say she has done my Math homework! (Yet!) Although I do sometimes wonder how she pulls it off. How is she so happy all the time? So patient? How?

Elizabeth has taught me things too. I have been more patient with my little

sisters, now that I have a perfect big sister as a role model. I have learnt how to be a big sister to my siblings. She has taught me how to support them, how to comfort them and most of all, how to love them.

This is how it's been going on for nine months. You know - her visiting. We talk about many things; my crushes, my hobbies, our favourite songs. I'm so glad I have someone I can relate to. I've changed. I've changed my way of thinking and the way I look at things. I've started to see the positive in situations as opposed to the negative side of things. People wonder what has come over me. Am I getting older? I don't know. The only thing I do know, though, is that this experience has made me stronger and changed me forever. It's made me more willing to help mum out around the house. It has helped me to be less short-tempered with my sisters. But most of all it has taught me to actually trust someone with all my heart and soul.

I never know when Elizabeth is going to come. But I know that I love her and she loves me and that we are best friends as well as sisters.

That is my secret, promise not to tell...