

## *Protected with Love*

Judy is the mother of a striking young woman, Kim, who herself was both a wife and mother of two young children. Unfortunately, Kim died unexpectedly of cardiac arrest several years before my meeting with Judy and her husband. Though numbed and stupefied by Kim's unanticipated death, all of those whom Kim left behind have, according to Judy, continued to experience her presence in some way. She was a devoted mother, wife, daughter and sister while she lived and has maintained her devotion to her family even after her death.

On a warm fall day, Judy and her husband sat with me in my office and painfully but lovingly shared several stories which demonstrated Kim's ongoing need to protect and watch over her loved ones, especially in times of danger. I recall how moved I was by their sense that Kim continues to be with them, despite her physically leaving them at the time of her death. My heart went out to this couple as they joyfully, even in their pain, spoke of situations in which they had felt a connection with their daughter.

Judy recalled an incident that had taken place several years before, which had involved her son, Matt. According to Judy, Matt and his fiancé, wanting to make the most of the unexpectedly mild autumn day, had decided to go for a ride in his Jeep. However, they had not thought to fasten their seat belts.

While they were both enjoying the yellow and red leaves twirling on the road, the Jeep suddenly hit something in the road, perhaps a brick or a very large rock. In a fraction of a second, Matt was thrown from the car. To make matters worse, he somehow became entangled in another vehicle and was dragged a good twenty feet before being run over. The whole thing was so horrible that onlookers who were present

at the scene were sure he could not have survived and that he must have died.

Fortunately his fiancé, though dazed and bruised, was not injured. With the help of those who stopped to offer their assistance, an ambulance was called and Matt was taken to the trauma center of a nearby major hospital. The situation was bleak and did not look promising for Matt.

One can only imagine the amazement of everyone—the doctors, nurses and witnesses—when Matt was examined and found to have no bruises, no broken bones, not anything that was indicative of the horror to which he had been exposed. Surely, between having been thrown out onto the road, dragged by another car and then actually run over, it was reasonable to expect that Matt’s body should have experienced significant trauma. But there was no indication anywhere of anything.

The whole thing seemed quite miraculous, which is what everyone was thinking. Everyone, that is, except Matt. During the entire time that he was being evaluated by the doctors and nurses, he kept repeating, “Kim is here. Kim is here, and she is holding me.” No one knew what Matt was talking about. Most of those present thought he was delirious.

Matt, however, knew that if it had not been for Kim, the situation would have been much worse. Realistically, he probably would have died. In fact, it was Kim who most likely had cradled him in such a way that he was physically unharmed by the accident. Matt was well aware of this and of Kim’s presence in the hospital. Both he and his family knew that he was alive thanks to Kim and her devoted protection.

Matt recovered rather quickly from the traumatic event, but what has continued to stay with him is the sense that Kim is always there for him and his family. He knows that, even though Kim physically died, she is with him, keeping him safe and out of harm’s way. Matt considers his sister’s presence to be an extraordinary gift for which he feels blessed and grateful.



Judy also described another story involving Matt and Kim. As she spoke of how close her children had been, despite the fact that Matt was six-and-a-half years younger than Kim, Judy became quiet, sad and tearful. It was difficult for her to talk about how Kim tended to be a second mother to her younger brother, and how much they had adored one another. Once again, my heart went out to Judy, identifying with her on a mother-to-mother level.

In this incident, Matt was out driving by himself on a bitter cold day. There had just been an ice storm and the roads were in terrible condition. A thin coat of ice covered most of the highway on which Matt was driving, making it difficult for him to keep his car on the road. It did not take long before he lost control of it. The car skidded on the ice, veered onto the shoulder, and was on the verge of diving down a thirty-foot drop. That's when it happened!

Just as Matt's car was about to go over the side, he saw Kim. Everything seemed to stand still. *It's Kim! It's really Kim!* he thought to himself. She had positioned herself in such a way that she blocked his car from going down the ravine. Thanks to her, his car came to a complete stop. Matt closed his eyes for a moment as he sat at the wheel, silently thanking God and Kim for saving his life. When he opened his eyes, his sister was gone—visually gone, that is. Though he initially questioned himself about whether he saw what he thought he saw, he knew without any doubt that it was Kim who was responsible for the fact that he was alive.

For the second time, Kim had made herself known to Matt in order to save his life. While there is no doubt that these experiences have brought great comfort to Matt and his family, they have also served as a validation of Kim's presence. It is this validation that is probably the greatest gift of all.

As I think back on these stories Judy that shared with me, I think of my patients, and especially those who have lost children. I believe that if I were such a parent, I would want to know of other parents who have had these experiences, because it would provide me with a sense of hope and perhaps reassurance that my child was all right and, perhaps, still with me.



Judy shared one more story about Kim and how she demonstrated her desire to keep a watchful eye over her mother. Judy recalls that about six months after Kim's death, she had had a shower to attend for a relative who lived in New Jersey. It was to take place on a Sunday afternoon during the middle of the summer, and she was looking forward to taking her time and making the trip there a relaxing experience.

However, the night before the shower, Judy had a vivid and memorable dream in which her daughter, Kim, had come to her. Kim had come with a clear, distinct message: Judy was not to go her usual way to the shower. Her route had to be changed. There was no explanation of the reason for the change, just the sense of urgency that her mother not travel the route she normally would have taken. The implication was clear that a longer route would be safer for Judy.

Upon awakening, Judy thought only briefly about the meaning of her dream. She knew that if Kim had come to her in a dream, there had to be a good reason. Thus, she allowed herself even more travel time than she normally would have to get to the shower. The day was warm and sunny, the scenery lush, making the ride much more relaxing.

When she arrived at the shower, everyone seemed to be talking about a horrific accident that had taken place on the highway. In fact, several of the guests were late because the accident had caused a major backup on the road. Unfortunately, this was an accident involving several fatalities.