

the short life and death of **my little brother** (9) together again

I am sure that my childhood depression resulted from guilt _____ grief: like my father I had _____ to protecting Guy that I felt I had let him down. There was loneliness too: while only children become used to occupying their time it is difficult to become an only child overnight at the age of nine. I _____ for any of Guy's toys or clothes to be given away. My parents had wanted to scatter his ashes at one of his favourite spots in Cornwall, but I was so _____ the idea that they did not. Instead, his ashes were kept in a cupboard in my father's bedroom.

For years, too, I _____ by the same dream: that Guy's death was itself a dream, his operation had been a success, and he was _____. Waking up night after night to the truth was a traumatic, exhausting experience. For 10 years, I never mentioned Guy and became agitated when parents or friends used his name. At 19, _____ my closest friend at university knew I had once had a brother.

Then, after reading some notes my father had written about Guy, I took a decision that it was wrong not to recognise his life. I still _____ if a new acquaintance asks me if I have any brothers or sisters. One reply denies Guy's life, the other seems to ask for sympathy. I have decided that the solution is to reply: "No. I don't now but I did have. I had a brother who died when he was seven," in a cheerful, _____ way.

Just days after my father's cremation nine years ago, I suggested to my mother that we scatter my father's ashes with Guy's at King Arthur's Castle, where my father _____ walk on the rugged Cornish coastline and my brother used to imagine he was Sir Lancelot or one of the other Knights of the Round Table. Shortly before Christmas, we released their ashes together. As the wind blew their remains down a steep cliff towards the sea below and the tears rolled gently down my face, I _____ from the fact that father and son were together again for the first time in 23 years.

alive and well » as well as » became reluctant » find it awkward » got so used » matter of fact » not even » opposed to » took comfort » used to love to » was haunted