



The summer I turned 16, my father gave me his refurbished '69 Chevy Malibu convertible. Cherry red, chrome accents, V8 engine—a gift wasted on me at that age. What did I know about classic cars? The important thing was that Hannah and I could drive

around Tucson with the top down.

Hannah was my best friend, a year younger but much taller, almost 5'10". "Hannah's a *knockout*," my mother always said. And sure enough, that summer she signed with a modeling agency. She was already doing catalog work and some runway.

A month after my birthday, Hannah and I went to the movies. On the way home we stopped at the McDonald's drive-through, putting the fries on the seat between us to share. "Let's ride around awhile," I said. It was a clear night, oven-warm, full moon slung low over the desert. Taking a curve too fast, I hit a patch of dirt and fishtailed. What happened next is hazy: I plowed through a neighbor's landscape wall and drove into a full-grown palm. The front wheels came to rest halfway up the tree trunk.

French fries on the floor, the dash, and my lap. An impossible amount of blood on Hannah's face, flaps of skin hanging into her eyes. They took us in separate ambulances. In the ER, my parents spoke quietly: Best plastic surgeon in the city. End of her modeling career. We'd been wearing lap belts, but the car didn't have shoulder harnesses. I'd cracked my cheekbone on the steering wheel; Hannah's forehead had split wide open on the dash. What would I say to her?

When her mother, Sharon, came into my hospital room, I started to cry, bracing myself for her anger. *I deserve it*, I thought. She sat beside me and took my hand. "I rear-ended my best friend when I was your age," she said. "I totaled her car and mine." "I'm so sorry" was all I could get out. "You're both alive," she said. "The rest is window dressing." I started to protest and Sharon stopped me. "I forgive you. Hannah will, too."

Hannah's stitches looked like an intricate road map tattooed on her forehead. She never modeled again. But Sharon's forgiveness allowed Hannah and me to get back in the car together that summer, to stay friends throughout high school and college, to be in each other's weddings, and to watch my four teenagers fawn over her three younger children. I think of her gift of forgiveness every time I'm tempted to resent someone for a perceived wrong. And whenever I see Hannah. The scars are so faded, no one else would notice, but in the sunlight I can still see the faint shimmer just below her hairline—for me, after all these years, an imprint of grace.

—JAMIE QUATRO,

AUTHOR OF, MOST RECENTLY, *I WANT TO SHOW YOU MORE*



Growing up, I adored Christmas: the most glittery, most

magical time of the year. But my stepfather made the holidays as erratic as his moods. One year he bought me an armful of stuffed animals; the next year we didn't have a tree or presents at all. I'm married now, and my husband and his family are Christmas crazy—my mother-in-law still has ornaments he made in second grade. For my first Christmas with them, she bought me a set of traditional German bride ornaments. There's a sparkly teapot that represents hospitality, a shiny red heart for love, and my favorite, a blue bird you clip onto a tree branch—it symbolizes joy. Last year my husband accidentally dropped the bird, and it shattered. I never realized how much it meant to me until it broke. I told him the set symbolized the normalcy and the family I craved as a kid and now finally had. A few weeks later, I unwrapped a new bird that looked like my old one. Every year it brings me unspeakable joy to place each ornament in its special spot on the tree.

—JENNIFER CHEN,
WRITER AND EDITOR