



# I Can't Remember His Voice

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**HIS HAIR. REDDISH-BROWN**, it turned almost blond in the summers. I remember that. His eyes. I picture those perfectly. A mix of blue and green, they were a mirror image of mine. His smile. Yes, I remember that well, too. Stretched wide across his face with straight white teeth, his smile was bigger, more impish than mine.

But I cannot remember the sound of my brother's voice. I heard Kevin's voice nearly every day for the first 21 years of my life. Now only bits of his timbre linger in my memory. There was that hoarse off-key screech when he sang Billy Joel's "Big Shot" in the shower. "You had to be a big shot, didn't ya. . . ." Once, as a joke, I recorded Kevin singing in the shower. I lost that cassette tape long ago.

Two years older, Kevin called me "Squirt," "Squirrel," and "Pud-face." He tousled my hair in affection as he teased. But what did his voice sound like as he spoke those silly names? If we were children now, our parents would capture our voices with ease on phones and video recorders. But my brother and I were born in the 1960s. My father videotaped our antics on Super 8mm film. The only sound we heard when we watched family movies was the whirl of the film projector.

Why, 26 years after my brother's death, think about his voice now? Blame our uber-connected society for renewing an old wish to again hear my big brother's voice. He'd been a counselor at a Boy Scout camp in Ohio, and some of the camp's former counselors recently formed a Facebook group. Kevin's name surfaced. A few months ago, I received a Facebook message from a former Scout saying that my brother's friend Dave was trying to find me. Kevin died on March 1, 1986, at age 23. He apparently fell asleep at the wheel and veered off a twisty road and down a cliff in Utah. He was on his way home to Colorado after visiting Dave in California. I hadn't heard from Dave since he wrote

that beautiful sympathy letter to my family: "Kevin always came on like ignited energy and got my life charged up."

Now, an almost 50-year-old Dave wrote via Facebook that he had tried to locate me five years ago when he stumbled across one of my brother's music cassettes. He had begun to listen to a Led Zeppelin song, and my brother's voice suddenly came on the speakers. The tape was Kevin's answering-machine greeting. "Not a huge memento, but I thought you might like to hear his voice again," Dave wrote.

Not a huge memento? I shivered. Were the goose bumps from excitement or trepidation? I wasn't sure. For months after my brother's death, I had hunted for something with Kevin's voice. Nothing surfaced. I immediately responded to Dave, gave him my address, and said I would love that tape. Nothing arrived in the mail. In a later e-mail, Dave said he hadn't been able to find the tape.

Kevin's voice has been absent from my life for a quarter of a century. I watched a video of Steve Jobs on YouTube weeks after his death and envied what his family and friends had—the ability to see and hear him forever. At a wake a few years ago, a friend's 5-year-old daughter stared transfixed at a video of her grandfather laughing his famous belly laugh. I look at photos and at silent family movies and try to hear my brother. Does the voice of someone we love have more power to comfort, to take us back in time than an image? What would it be like to hear my brother again, just for a moment?

*Does the voice of someone we love have more power to comfort, to take us back in time than an image?*

*Linda K. Wertheimer, the Globe's former education editor, is writing a memoir about how the loss of her brother led her closer to her faith. Send comments to [connections@globe.com](mailto:connections@globe.com).*

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