DEDICATION

To my brother Chris, the tenth and last child in our family. From the moment he was born, he was larger than life, weighing eleven pounds, with curly blond hair and a twinkle in his eye. With his take-charge attitude and great sense of humor, he lived life to the fullest. What I remember most are his hugs. Real ones, as though he meant it.

Chris would do anything for his friends. He always stood up for what he believed in, and he challenged people to live up to his high standards. As captain of his high school football team, he got his teammates to quit drinking and taking drugs when he did. Once he sent a letter to a wayward teacher, challenging him to set a better example for his students.

Chris had a fierce loyalty to his family and brought us together in times of trouble. Just before he died, he organized a family reunion. It turned out to be his own going-away party.

Chris wasn't always this way. When he was just five years old, our dad died, leaving him with a hole in his heart and a chip on his shoulder. Without a father to guide and stand up for him, he struggled to find his way in the world. Growing up, he protected himself with his temper, so no one would get too close.

Until one summer, when he went to camp. Chris always loved being with his friends—playing basketball, sailing, water-skiing, and climbing mountains. But that summer he had a revelation that helped him put things in perspective and began to fill the hole in his heart: The words

“God so loved us, that he gave . . .” really clicked with him. From that summer on, Chris came to see that life was about giving. When he gave to others, his life became more meaningful, purposeful, and fulfilling.

Just before Chris died, he wrote a letter to his friend Toby:

Sitting here, talking to my roommate, listening to Pink Floyd, eating round Doritos. Midterms are coming up this week. I’m hoping for the best. I’m also working for the best, too. Tonight I asked God to show me the right ways to go about preparing for each test, to help me avoid distractions and to give me the strength to do my best. I think He listened. I really ask a lot of Him . . . and often feel that I have too little to offer in thanks. I think that by helping other people in this world to utilize the unique assets He gave them, I could help Him as He has helped me. It is easy to say.

Through the ups and downs of his brief life, Chris became a young hero in our community. He believed that if we each pitched in, we could all do just about anything. With his infectious smile, he invited you to join him. When he was killed at nineteen in a car crash, his high school created the Chris Lamed award, presented each year to the student who gave the most of him- or herself.

Losing my brother at such a young age left a huge hole in my heart, but his spirit now lives on in the hearts of those lives he touched, through every generous act. His tragic death reminded me of the preciousness of life and inspired me to live mine more fully. It also challenged me to do whatever I could to help build a better world for our children. Chris was and is my hero; he gave me the courage to write this

book and guided me in my quest to help other young people open, as he did, the gift of giving.