

My Sister, Barbara Hernandez

Barbara was the first person to extend a warm welcome to my family when we began attending Portland Avenue Baptist Church in Oklahoma City. “Come over to our house today,” she said, “we’re celebrating our daughter Sara’s high school graduation.”

“But we’re not family,” I thought to myself. “And we’re new here. How could we possibly accept such an invitation?”

“Thanks, but we really can’t,” I said. But she kept asking. And then I figured it out: We really are family, Barbara and I.

It’s not just that we both like olives, (black ones are supreme), and cheese, and cherry tomatoes fresh from the garden, and revisiting Red Rock Canyon in Hinton, Oklahoma, we also like words.

Two years ago I invited Barbara to join Wordwrights. We went to meetings together, gleaning advice from poets and IT experts and self-publishers. Barbara figured out the balloon function on Word so that she could read and edit my articles and I figured out how to use commas so that I could add in a few extra punctuation marks.

Barbara encouraged me to write my first poem. I encouraged her to write more prose, my favorite of which ends with this line: “If Jesus is in my mirror, I am beautiful.”

Most of all, my sister and I share a love for Jesus. Two weeks before Barbara graduated to glory, we opened a hymnal and sang together in the hospital. The nurses came in the room; we paused but then continued her clear alto a steady counterpoint to my wobbly soprano.

“I remember that Easter is your favorite holiday, sis,” I said. “Do you have a favorite Easter song?”

“I like that one that starts out low and dark, and then rises,” she said.

“I bet it’s this one,” I said, beginning to sing Robert Lowry’s classic hymn, *Christ Arose*.

Low in the grave He lay,
Jesus, my Savior,
Waiting the coming day,
Jesus, my Lord!
Vainly they watch His bed,
Jesus, my Savior;
Vainly they seal the dead,
Jesus, my Lord!
Death cannot keep his Prey,
Jesus, my Savior;
He tore the bars away,
Jesus, my Lord!
Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o’er His foes,
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever, with His saints to reign.
He arose! He arose!
Hallelujah! Christ arose!

It comforts me to know that Jesus has given Barbara a glorious welcome home because, yes, she’s family.

Lori Williams