

## CHAPTER TWO SHILLI NAMIBIA



Shilli and Matheus, identical twins, were born in Walvis Bay, Namibia. Growing up with a desert on one side, the sea on another, they saw flamingos, pelicans and dolphins, wild horses, gazelles, and desert elephants. Their Father worked on the ships in the harbor. The boys loved to dune ski and play cricket.

When Shilli and Matheus were born, their Mother's sister, Cellie, had given them each a tree, planting them side by side in the front yard. As the twins grew, the trees followed.

Shilli and Matheus' cousin, Neil, (a year younger) was their best friend. The three boys did everything together, calling themselves "Tri,"(Shilli) "Um," (Matheus) and "Virate"(Neil).

Neil had been very small at birth. He had Progeria, a genetic disease accelerating the aging process. As he grew and lost his hair, his skin becoming coarse, his eyes very big, he was the first to joke about how old he looked. Though a year younger, he jokingly told Shilli and Matheus they had to call him "The Old Man," respecting him for his age. "The doctor said people with Progeria can die from heart disease. That won't happen to me. My heart would never hurt me!"

One day, Matheus got sick. When Matheus died, Shilli felt a part of him was gone, not an arm or a leg but a part of who he was. Neil stayed at Shilli's house for weeks afterward. They didn't talk much, just being together was enough. Whenever Neil had to go to the hospital, Shilli was always at his side.

When Shilli began having nightmares (“I was lost and scared”) his Mother told him “Start talking to Matheus, tell him how you feel.” A few weeks later, Shilli was walking home from school, angry no one seemed to care that someone had cheated in the cricket match, when he heard Matheus’ voice. “Not everyone is honest.” Shilli never knew when he’d hear the voice. “Try your hardest.” “Keep your word.” “Be kind.” He listened and remembered.

In the years that followed, the branches of Matheus’ tree reached out, embracing and encircling Shilli’s tree.

One day at school, the teacher said something to the class that Shilli didn’t understand. “You are each a reflection of your parents.” When he looked into a mirror and saw his reflection, it was turned around and opposite. Shilli loved his parents and wanted to be just like them. If he was a “reflection” of them, what did this mean?

Walking on the beach, he heard the voice again. “Do what you love.” He looked down and saw a piece of driftwood. He took it home and began carving. People started to come from miles away to buy his unique printing blocks.