

Sole survivor

AND THE GUILT THAT COMES WITH BEING THE LAST ONE STANDING



I

have this picture: It's a 40-year-old black and white postcard with the words "Christmas greetings from our home to yours" written along the top. It could be any family from the 1960s — a young boy and girl nestled in their parents' loving embrace — but it's mine. Or was mine. You see, everyone but me in that picture is dead. By the time I turned 41, I'd lost them all — my mom in my twenties, my brother in my thirties, my father in my forties. One, two, three.

Flipping the calendar to December also flips a switch in my heart and, inevitably, guilt flows full force through my veins, with all its dark and sticky questions. Topping the list: Why me? Why have I been spared?

Seven years have passed since I buried Dad and, even though I have a younger brother I can turn to for strength and support, when I stare at this holiday card that represents my first decade, I feel alone, anxious and racked with guilt. What am I dealing with and, more importantly, how do I move past it to a more hopeful place?

Turns out, I have survivor's guilt (SG), says Nasreen Khatri, a clinical psychologist who heads up the cognitive behavioural therapy

BY BETH THOMPSON

BONNIE BAXTER