

**One Amazing Person: Kathleen Anne McBride**  
**Mary AKT Gallagher**

I was born an introvert. From the time I was born I had a really hard time moving beyond where I felt most at ease, which was, namely, in my own head or with the people closest to me. I preferred observing things, where I could judge but be safe from judgment, and I was never on the spot.

That's how I preferred things, but it's not how they turned out. Another thing I was born with was a rather pushy cousin who was also my best friend. Katie was my senior by a mere twelve days and had poise and self-esteem in abundance. She loved the spotlight and was gifted with the creative mind and sense of humor to make the spotlight love her back. And if we weren't so close, I would probably still be really shy and awkward because I wouldn't have been able to get a word in edgewise even if I'd wanted to.

But she was extremely generous with her attention (once she had it) and while she never forced me into the limelight, she did show me that it was a safe place to be and that the world didn't come crashing down if you made a mistake while someone was watching. Katie staged performances that were mainly just ruses to keep us from having to leave toward the end of a party, but they were elaborately enacted ruses. Most often, we performed our own version of Cinderella, in which the

title character had a daughter – I don't know how that happened – played by our cousin Maggie, who didn't want to be evil but didn't want to be a servant, either.

I was Cinderella, always, because Katie insisted that The Wicked Stepmother was way more fun to portray, and that she had enough on her plate with directing anyway. (Directing entailed a lot of whispering loudly, “C'mon! It's your turn! Come out! They're getting bored!”) She had her big brother Patrick fake a waltz with me to be Prince Charming. (Until recently, I hadn't given him credit for being a nice guy and dancing a girly dance for a girly play.) I always chalked it up to Katie, and her special ability to bring people together and have everybody have fun.

Through the talent shows and the plays and the renditions of Britney Spears' “Oops, I Did It Again” I developed my own sense of confidence and stopped having to borrow from Katie. I realized I liked to sing, I liked it a lot, and I wasn't half bad at it. And I grew in a way that would have been impossible for a girl like me to do without that steady, loving reassurance that always pushed but never too hard, embodied in this cousin that was more like my sister.

A lot of what I am today comes from Katie. Scratch that – a lot of what I am *proud* of today comes from her. I am a writer because of her; she gave me inspiration and an exuberant personality to write about. Family is a huge part of my life because *she* was a huge part of my life. When I speak or dance in public, I am only able to do so

because she showed me how to be brave, and how to have faith in myself. When I am kind to people (which I will admit freely is not as often as it should be) it is because she did so many good things for me that I want to be that person to someone else. I want other people to feel as great as she made me feel.

I've learned countless things from her: how to be strong in the face of adversity; what to do in a lightning storm (jump out of the pool, run in her mom's room and hide under the covers together); how to torture your cousin's fiancé (make him be the grandpa when playing house; try to poison him by crushing mints in a glass of water); how to do a pencil dive; and how to laugh at myself. But I think the first and perhaps the most important lesson was how to believe in my own abilities, which is a total cliché, but still necessary, and it was an ability I lacked.

The One Amazing Thing in my life was the fact that I knew Katie; that she was my best friend and that I got to be hers; and I have been blessed by the time that I spent with her. She pulled the best parts of me to the surface, and she made my childhood an adventure for which I will always be grateful and will never forget.