

Joie de Vivre

Just one short year ago when my brother David and his best friend Ben were applying to colleges, David asked Ben to write some peer evaluations for him. Ben wrote the evaluations and offered to let David see them before submitting them. David declined – that was the kind of trust David had for his good friend, Ben. He trusted Ben enough to know that nothing Ben would do or say would bring him harm. He knew that Ben was unquestionably (completely) honest, loyal, trustworthy, and reliable.

So, when I was preparing to speak here today, I thought about how to begin and I decided to use the peer evaluation as a model for describing how I knew Ben. When I think of Ben, I remember a bibliophile, robust and confident, with a vivid imagination.

Ben loved to read. He'd read just about anything, anytime, anywhere. He especially loved history and fantasy. <<What about historical fiction????>> Early on in ESP at French Road, Ben and David wrote a play together???? What else did they do in ESP? Later at TCMS Ben and David enjoyed competing and winning the Battle of the Books. Kids always wanted Ben to be on their team because if Ben was on your team, you could be certain he had read every single book on the reading list (probably more than once).

Ben was an easy going young man. Almost nothing set him back or frustrated him. When he was with family and friends and even when he was alone, Ben was always upbeat and engaged in whatever was going on. I remember when he and my family drove to Notre Dame for a football game. Ben traveled 9 hours in the car to see a game he wasn't even interested in. He was with his friend though, so the trip was fun. He walked jauntily across the Notre Dame campus as if he knew exactly where he was going. He enjoyed everything about the spirit of the day – from bagpipers playing to lousy hotdogs. Even when we couldn't find a place to eat, Ben didn't complain. Now, don't get me wrong... Ben loved to tease. With his droll and sometimes sharp humor, he teased his mother, his father, my mother, my brother, his teachers, just about everyone... but like the friend he was, his teasing was always done in a warm and gentle way. It was never cruel, but rather a playful way of saying "I know you so well and I like you so much that I feel comfortable sharing this funny with you".

Ben had the smarts, grades, scores, and other accomplishments that might have led to boastfulness. But gloating was no part of Ben. Instead, Ben was earnest, sincere, and a quiet hard worker. He took secret pride in achieving top SAT scores. He knew he'd earned each and every point; he knew he didn't have to brag out loud to everyone about them or tease others who hadn't done as well. It was enough for Ben to know that he'd done his best... and his efforts had paid off handsomely. The same was true throughout his unusual but successful Mock Trial career. Unlike most other kids, Ben hoped to be a witness, not a lawyer. Where everyone else saw courtroom dramatics as an end in and of itself, Ben was always most comfortable telling his own story. He delighted in fencing with a cross-examining attorney, shrugging off those probes and harassments and establishing his own version of reality.

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Ben was also circumspect about brandishing about his material good fortune. When he and Jeff scored one of the much-coveted Wii game consoles, Ben was delighted. He knew having the Wii made him the envy of his friends, but having the game console wasn't the important thing to Ben. Instead, he took quiet pleasure in the expedition itself: the cool thing was the story – the story of the midnight trek Ben and Jeff made together to get the game.

Despite his joy in the Wii, I think Ben's favorite chance to spend time with his dad was last summer when they worked together. Ben was handling more complicated stuff than anyone had anticipated, but he liked it, relished going to and from work with Jeff, and had a real feeling of accomplishment and pride in his achievements, in his father and himself.

Ben's other working experience was largely volunteer. He taught swimming at Monroe Middle school for four years, and worked together with David on a capstone service project at Foodlink. Foodlink led to sore feet, to learning a bit about the heavy lifting side of work, but Ben had a good time because he was with friends and helping people. He'd left behind the world of suits and ties, at least for the time, and reveled in the chance to live in shorts and work in a setting a little less rigid than the halls he knew. Ben didn't know exactly what he wanted to do, enthralled by the virtues of teaching, law, history, academia and much else.....he was very much a young man on the threshold of life, stepping into a world he would define.

Ben knew he was deeply and completely loved by family, Jeff, Lisa, and Laurel, Kobe and Cassie and he passionately loved and honored them in return. With his friends, Ben was far more selective: he enjoyed the fellowship many, but deep and abiding friendship with a select few – they shared common interests, they were not self-conscious in front of each other. It was okay for one to talk and the other to listen... because sometimes, in silence, there is love.

I know we'll always remember Ben anytime we eat angel food cake, chicken wings, or ribs. I know we'll remember Ben on his birthday, March 6th, because it was a day of great joy! I know we'll remember Ben in 100 small ways each and every day because he was a great friend and he will remain forever in our hearts.

- Terry Pratchett, Harry Potter, Tolkien and Salvatore
- Suit and Tie transitioned to Madras Shorts and Summer of '69 T-shirt with goofy Docksiders..... Still experimenting, still defining himself
- Loved Dylan, Beatles, counterculture music about social causes