

Thanks to all of you who have spoken on Ben's behalf this afternoon, and thank you all for coming here today to Brook Lea.

Brook Lea is a place that Ben used to like to come to. I couldn't get him too interested in golf, but when he was younger I could usually get him to come to the driving range with me to hit some balls with the promise of some chicken wings afterwards. So when you see extra crispy wings among the food available later, you'll know why they're there.

My main purpose for speaking is to publicly express our thanks to those who have helped us during this terribly difficult time. However, I know that not everyone is aware of what happened to Ben, and so I'd like to just very briefly explain what happened.

Six weeks ago today, on the afternoon of Saturday, November 10, Ben a freshman at the College of W&M, in Williamsburg Virginia was traveling with the college fencing team to a tournament in Philadelphia. At the same time that afternoon Lisa and I were on our way to Philadelphia to see him fence the next day.

Ben was in the front passenger seat of the car being driven by the team's 86 year old fencing coach, and there were two other fencers in the back seat. Near Richmond VA, while traveling at approximately 70 mph, the car inexplicably left the highway and crashed head on into a tree. (The cause of the crash has never been determined, but we understand that mechanical failure and driver medical conditions such as a heart attack or stroke have been eliminated as likely causes.)

When the emergency medical team arrived, the coach was dead, one of the boys in the back seat had suffered severe abdominal injuries, and the other had just a broken arm. (Both have since recovered.) Ben was alive but unconscious and he was airlifted to the Virginia Commonwealth University hospital in downtown Richmond.

Lisa and I had received news of the accident when we were south of Syracuse and we drove directly to Richmond, getting there that Saturday night.

As some of you know, despite the horrific nature of the crash, the original prognosis for Ben was encouraging. He was expected to come out of the coma in a few days, and perhaps be 100% or close to it in a few months or a year.

However, it was soon discovered that his front two carotid arteries, which are a critical source of blood supply to the brain, were damaged beyond repair. Every effort was taken to increase the amount of blood his brain was receiving, but over the course of the next two weeks, the inadequacy of blood supply caused severe and irreversible brain damage, and, ultimately, his death on Tuesday, November 27.

We ended up staying in Virginia the entire time, about three weeks. Laurel came down from Madison Wisconsin twice, once for a few days and then for the last week and a half.

By the way, Ben's organs were made available for transplant. One of his kidneys in fact was flown to California in the hopes that it would be a match for one of my sisters, who has been waiting several years for a transplant. It wasn't a close enough match for her, but it was given to another deserving person. That's why some of us are wearing organ donation pins.

We are grateful to many people in Virginia for their assistance and support. We'd like to express our gratitude to:

- The emergency medical team, and the wonderful medical staff at the hospital.

- The Hospitality House of Richmond, a Ronald McDonald type facility that made it so easy for us to stay in Richmond near the hospital and focus our attention on Ben
- The W&M administration, whose concerns for Ben and Spencer, his severely injured teammate, came from the heart and who organized a wonderful memorial service for Ben in the chapel in the historic Wren building on campus.
- And especially, the students at W&M. From the day of the crash until the very end, they kept coming to comfort us, and to talk to Ben. This included dorm mates, other friends, and especially, his teammates from the fencing club. They came during the evenings, on weekends, even during the Thanksgiving holiday when some had to drive an hour or more to get there. They sent cards, and made postings on face book. Some even brought their parents or siblings. In short, they did everything they could to show their friendship and concern.

We have recently learned that because of the fencing team's efforts, a sportsmanship award, and a spring fencing tournament will be named in the memory of Ben and his coach.

Now comes the most difficult part – how to adequately thank all of those in Rochester who have done so much to help us through this. Your response has been overwhelming. You've emailed us, you've sent cards, you've telephoned, you've stopped by, you've brought food, you've prayed for us, you've sent flowers and plants, you've run personal errands for us, you've donated to Ben's memorial fund, you raked our yard, you sent us clothes and personal items when we were in Richmond, and you've come here to day to participate in this memorial to our son.

We heard from people who have known Ben all his life, from those who got to know him more recently, from those whom Lisa, Laurel, or I have known but who never

got to meet Ben, and we even heard from families whom we don't know but who understand the tragedy of losing a child and wanted to offer their support.

To all of you who have reached out to us, we'll try to respond individually but we know that we can't thank you enough.

As we move forward and try to live a fulfilling and happy life without Ben, we will always have comfort in knowing how happy he was at W&M. He went to college with high hopes, and he was truly thriving.

(He used to complain in a kidding way to Lisa and I that we were too bossy and controlling as parents, and of course he was right. But we all knew that college would be the time for him to become his own person. Just before he left I said to him "You know, when you go off to college you should come home a different person, and he knew exactly what I meant.)

At college, he was enjoying his classes and doing well in all of them. He was meeting many new people, and starting to form real friendships. And fencing, so important to him, couldn't have been going any better.

We'll also always have comfort in knowing that he had no doubts about how much we loved him, and in knowing how he felt about us.

And so the last person we want to thank is Ben, for being such a loving and precious son, brother, nephew, cousin, teammate and friend for 18 great years.