

Thank you all for coming today and giving Lisa, Laurel, and me the chance to publicly express our thanks to those who have helped us and made our burden easier to bear.

I first want to thank the emergency medical team that came to the crash site so quickly, and the medical personal at the emergency room of the Virginia Commonwealth University hospital. They saved his life and made it possible for us to have those precious extra days with him.

The staff at the hospital was excellent. Everyone we talked with outside of the hospital told us how lucky we were that Ben had been taken there, that the quality of care provided there couldn't be better. Nothing we encountered would cause us to question that assessment and on top of that, the hospital has an atmosphere of friendliness and caring that is striking. Get on an elevator and someone with a VCU badge whom you never saw before smiles and says hello. Walk down the hall and a stranger asks "How are you today?"

The medical staff did everything they could to save him. 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 and perhaps be 100% or close to it in a few months or a year.

However while his lungs began to heal well, it was soon discovered that his front two carotid arteries, which are a critical source of blood supply to the brain, were severely and irreparably damaged. They were providing only 25% of what they should have. 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 damage and, ultimately, his death on Tuesday.

The medical staff and others from the hospital were there for Lisa Laurel and me through all of this and we connected emotionally with several of them.

Next we want to thank the Hospitality House of Richmond, a Ronald McDonald type living facility located near the hospital that made it so easy for us to stay in Richmond and focus our attention on Ben.

We also extend our thanks to W&M administration. Their concerns and wishes for a full recovery for Ben and Spencer his teammate came from the heart. When we needed anything they were quick to respond. And when we needed to have time alone they respected our wishes. There is nothing more than we could have expected from them. President Nichol especially went well beyond the call of duty, visiting Ben in the hospital twice and consistently asking about his welfare.

There is a hidden treasure here in Williamsburg, and his name is Jeffrey Buffkin, whom you've met here today. Jeffrey is a collegiate minister with the Virginia Baptist Mission Board. He met with us at the hospital, and communicated by phone and email many, many times throughout our ordeal. All during this time, the only thing that mattered to him was to do whatever he could to support and help us in whatever way he could. Our own religious beliefs and practices did not matter to him, he just wanted to help. He is a special person and has truly found the right calling.

By the way, we have met his family and you never would have guessed it but his kids are absolutely adorable.

This brings me to the words of appreciation that I find most difficult to adequately express. When Ben decided to attend W&M, we knew what to expect in terms of course offerings, academic reputation, residence and dining, and so forth. But the hardest question to answer, of course, was what would the other students be like?

We've learned the answer to that question during the past 20 days, and what a great impression they have made on us. Our admiration began from the first moments that we got to the hospital, late on a Saturday night, and found a large number of his teammates there. They had been there for several hours, waiting for us to arrive so that they could express the concerns and offer their support.

It didn't stop then. Up 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 they had to drive an hour or more to get here. 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.

Our most uplifting moments were when we'd be sitting with Ben at the hospital and a nurse would come and say, "You have some visitors", or "There are some people here to see you" and I'd be puzzled, who could that be? Someone from the hospital with forms to fill out? Then he or she would say, "I think they're some of his friends from the college", and then it would click, and it felt so good. Or we'd be coming back from getting something to eat and we'd turn the corner and see a group of students, some perhaps with instantly recognizable fencing club jackets, we'd start to smile. It was always great to see them. We can't thank you enough.

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

Again, thank you for coming and giving us the opportunity to express our gratitude.