

Trey Lefler's Story - A Tribute by His Sister
All Saints' Chapel, University of the South, Sewanee, TN
Wednesday, November 28, 2007

-AS PREPARED-

A July 2006 *Time* magazine article called "The New Science of Siblings" says: "From the time they are born, our brothers and sisters are our collaborators and co-conspirators, our role models and cautionary tales. They are our scolds, protectors, goads, tormentors, playmates, counselors, sources of envy, objects of pride. They teach us how to resolve conflicts and how not to; how to conduct friendships and when to walk away from them. Sisters teach brothers about the mysteries of girls; brothers teach sisters about the puzzle of boys. Our spouses arrive comparatively late in our lives; our parents eventually leave us. Our siblings may be the only people we'll ever know who truly qualify as partners for life. 'Siblings,' says family sociologist Katherine Conger of the University of California, Davis, 'are with us for the whole journey.' "

So when Trey's girlfriend Jane set up a website last week so we could communicate with all of you about Trey, it made sense that she asked ME to fill in the section called "Trey's Story." After all, I've had a front row seat for the past 25 years. I don't know if you've checked the site, but I still haven't written Trey's story. And to tell you the truth, I'm not sure I ever will. Trey Lefler cannot be captured in words.

I've tried twice before.

As we sat by Trey's side in the hospital last week, we read to him from his Bible and one of the things we found stuck in it was the card I'd given him for his high school graduation. It read:

"To tell you that I am proud is such an understatement. Of course I am so proud of all of your successes – you are the best of the best – but what I am more proud of is your value as a person. I tell people all the time that you are such a good and caring brother, and I mean it. I never would have guessed that the same kid that hit me on the head with a stainless steel meat tenderizer would now be my very best friend and most favorite person in the world. I know it probably hasn't always been easy being my little brother, but you have left a mark and will continue to leave a mark on the world that is completely your own."

I tried again when he was graduating from Sewanee. What I wrote is framed and hanging on the wall of his room in Nashville. I wrote to him:

"A Psychology professor once told my class that humans don't have any REAL memories before the age of three, and that any memories we THINK we have are simply created images of ideas and events that people have described to us. In a rare and vocal moment of wisdom, I informed my professor that he was dead wrong. My proof didn't satisfy him, but it's always been more than enough for me. Even though I was only two years and 11 months old, I vividly remember the day you were born. My life was never to be the same.

"It only took me about 12 years to get used to you, and just a few more to discover that being your big sister is at the core of who I am, and more fulfilling, more special, and more defining than anything else about me.

"It has not always been fun. There were battles – bloody battles – along the way. The words "You've come a long way, baby" were written for you. I think it took you about 12 years to realize that the reason it is so hard

being my little brother is because I dream a bigger dream for you than you dream for yourself. For better or worse, I think I've become one of the voices inside your head.

"As you graduate from Sewanee that dream I dream is much clearer and closer than it has been before. The person—the man—you have become never ceases to amaze and humor me. You are fratty, and you like to have a good time, and you spend too much of other peoples' money, and you don't return phone calls in a timely manner, and according to your friends you are stinky, but you are also one of the cutest, nicest, brightest, most good-intentioned people I know. You make good choices and you surround yourself with special people. You love your family and you love the Lord and you have the "love thy neighbor as thyself" thing down pat. Seeing as how it's the Second Commandment, it seems you have your priorities straight as well.

"Trey Lefler, my little brother, my other—I'm so happy that you're the common denominator and the person I've shared my journey with. The only other person in the world who knows all the clowns to left of me and jokers to the right...On this special day you know Momma's gonna say, 'I hope you dance' and that Daddy will say, 'Proud of you, Boy,' and eventually I will I say 'Love your body, Larry.' But first, remember your three rules. Remember your measuring stick. Remember it's all gravy, and remember: You may only be one person in the world, But you mean the world to one person... (And that's me.)"

What we found out last week is that Trey means the world to practically - the whole world! Trey Lefler has made us all realize the power of one.

As a friend of Trey's wrote to me: "Trey was a gentleman, a patriot, and, above all, a true friend and incredible human being. He lived his life with a spirit that could light up a room and warm your heart. It was an honor and privilege to have called Trey my friend."

Last week was overwhelming on so many levels: overwhelming shock, fear, and sadness, but also overwhelming support, kindness, faith, grace and above all - overwhelming LOVE.

A priest shared something with us last week that was a huge comfort. She said, "The pain you are feeling is love." The pain we are all feeling - pain so horrible you're not sure you can breathe - is LOVE. Love for Trey.

And all week as we prayed to God, pleaded with God, and tried to bargain with God, God provided what we needed.

Trey Lefler created a phenomenon. People who don't even know Trey, but know YOU, prayed for him. Thousands of them. And I bet some people's first conversations with God in a long time, or maybe ever, were about Trey Lefler. We could feel your prayers. They were powerful. More powerful than the fluorescent lights of his hospital room.

When we prayed for hope – we were inspired.

When we prayed for strength – somehow we found the power to go on.

When we prayed for comfort – it arrived in the form of phone calls, visits, emails, web postings, food, flowers, comments from strangers –

And sometimes in moments of humor:

Like when my Pap remembered that when Trey was little and would do something bad – which happened A LOT – and Pap would ask him, “Trey – why did you do that?” Trey would say, “So I did.”

Or when Mom – in the very darkest hour, when we knew all that could be done for Trey had be done – began crying out, “What a man, what a man, what a man, what a mighty good man...” and I had to inform her that using the words of a Salt-n-Peppa song was probably not the most appropriate way to grieve for Trey.

When we prayed for a miracle, that came, too. As you’ve heard me say and seen me write so many times over the past week, Trey Lefler, more than anyone else I know, truly lived his life according to the Second Commandment – Love thy neighbor as thyself. And on Thanksgiving morning, we received the news that Trey would die the same way he lived – by loving and giving. As a natural extension of his generous spirit, he had chosen to be an organ donor.

Trey’s story became a resurrection story. Out of death and despair, came new life, and our Thanksgiving became an Easter. Because of Trey’s loving choice, at least five people are living new lives.

And finally, God provided us TIME. For the past 25 years, God provided us TIME.

Time for Trey to be a son, grandson, godson, and stepson,

Time to be a nephew and a cousin,

Time to be friend,

Time to be a classmate and a teammate,

Time to be a boyfriend,

Time to be a brother,

And this past week, God provided time, and Trey provided a fight, so we could come together as Trey’s extended family and say goodbye.

And what I am here to share with you today, in this beautiful place that Trey loved so much, wearing this horrible Crimson color he loved so dear, is this: Trey Lefler’s story has not ended.

We honor Trey by continuing to write it. As a friend wrote to me: “All we can do is live our lives better and stronger, more loving and giving because we have known Trey and because he was so special. And in those ways his spirit will live and his life will have been a blessing that pours forth and touches countless others for years and years to come.”

We continue to write Trey’s story by talking about Trey and laughing about Trey and doing some of our favorite things that remind us of Trey:

By seeking out opportunities to have outrageous amounts of fun

By singing the wrong words to songs, off key, and at the top of our lungs

By dancing at weddings and parties and any chance we get

By fishing

By playing basketball, football, softball and golf

By cheering for the Loudon Redskins, the Sewanee Tigers, the Tennessee Titans and OF COURSE the Alabama Crimson Tide

By taking in stray pets and stray people

By working crossword puzzles

By appreciating good meals and ordering more food than we could ever possibly finish

By tipping a cab driver \$20 and buying a round of drinks for an entire bar with money we don't have

By wearing incredible Halloween costumes

By doing favors for the people in our lives and expecting nothing in return

By becoming organ donors

By loving God and doing his will

And by loving each other.

I doubt any of you are looking at me today and thinking: Laura Lefler is the luckiest girl on earth. But I believe I am. I met Trey on the day he was born, and I held his precious hand during his very last moments – and I enjoyed so many of the days and moments in between. What a gift! I got more of Trey Lefler's 25 years on earth than anyone else.

And although I won't be spending the next 25 or 50 years with Trey as I'd planned, he will always be the most transformative figure in my life story.

Trey and I grew up listening to Motown with Momma and Daddy, so it's appropriate that a Gladys Knight and the Pips song comes to mind:

"If anyone should ever write MY life story

For whatever reason there might be

You'll be there between each line of pain and glory, Trey Lefler –

'Cause you're the best thing that ever happened to me."

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