FORM C
COLLEGE SCHOLARS PROJECT APPROVAL

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"The Jay bird Sings, a memoir" — Project Title

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The Jaybird Songs



Drew Holcomb

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Preface

This work began a long time ago, when my little brother, Jay Hatchett Holcomb, was born with an unexpected birth defect called Spina Bifida. By many of the world's standards and assumptions, Jay should have been a burden and a sad reminder of how painful life can be. Instead, he became a rich blessing to my family, our friends, and other people who came into contact with him or simply heard about his rich personality and his faithful and humorous perseverance through the trials and episodes that life brought him. This work, ***The Jaybird Songs,*** tells the tale of how a courageous boy brought joy, encouragement, laughter, and love to his family, his friends, and to me, his older brother.

Jay's life has always been a story that people who knew him have shared with each other, and also with other people who did not know him. I find myself telling stories to perfect strangers about this kid that I grew up with who molded and shaped the way I live and view the world. Since his early death, I have wanted to put his extraordinary life and personality into writing for two reasons. The first is a personal one. Because he was my younger brother and companion, I loved him dearly and openly. My first intent is to preserve in my own mind and heart the things about him that I, and of course my family, remember so well and look back on with bittersweet joy. The second reason I write about

Jay is to carry on the tradition of sharing him. From the beginning, Jay was not just our brother, or son; he belonged to all of our friends, the people sitting next to us at ballgames or in the church pews, and others we have come into prolonged contact with. In that same vein, although Jay has sweetly departed, the stories live on, and so I write for all the people who knew him and served him and listened to him. Finally, I write for the people who did not know him, but might be encouraged or entertained by the telling of these stories surrounding Jay.

In order to remind myself of all that was the quintessential 'Jay,' I submerged myself into a sea of material relating to his life, including anything from videos of his third grade school play, my mother's diaries, letters of condolence at his death, my own journals, to his own schoolwork saved by my mother. I also sent out letters to numerous people I thought would have significant things to add to that body of research material, such as his peers, caretakers, our family, and others, asking them for an personal interview. There is an obvious limitation to this process, in that I will have undoubtedly left out some people who spent time with Jay or who have interesting perspective and perceptions about his life. However, I do not assume that the finished product would ever be a complete product in terms of inclusivity. Another limitation I encountered was the inability to interview everyone who I had hoped to, either because they did not want to do so, or because of time limitations on their end. In some cases, people wrote their thoughts to me in letterform, which was very helpful.

These interviews, alongside the other material, made it possible for me to acquire information I either never had or had long forgotten, and it enabled me to write about times in Jay's life where I was absent in body or mind. In other words, I wrote this work

from my own, limited, perspective, but based on the thoughts, memories, stories, and reflections of others who have just as much to offer regarding his life as I have. There were many decisions I had to make in terms of what to include and exclude, based not merely on how important I deemed the information, but on how I saw that it could contribute to the flow of the writing in general, and how well it matched what others were saying and thinking. Because of the enthusiasm and support of these people, I was able to paint pictures of things I had never seen, and to portray Jay in ways I might never have seen without their words and help.

I write this work from the present, which is in some ways far removed from Jay's life, but in other ways still very close. Compared to many other biographical pieces in the memoir genre, eighteen years from Jay's birth and only four from his death, this piece is very close to the subject, with memories still fresh and vivid about Jay. However, it remains that time has passed, and with time details about the past can become tainted and there could obviously be descrepancies about certain occurrences recorded in this work. I do not claim that everything in this work happened just as it is written, although I have tried to remain as true to the source material as I know how. Memory is a powerful tool, and it could be argued that memory is just as important and telling as reality. Hopefully the stories about Jay's life and death reflect the reality of history, but also the way that people remember him,

The actual research and writing of the majority of this work was done whilst a student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. As I mentioned before, the project has been an ideal in my mind for much longer, but being at the University gave me an opportunity to have resources and time to do it under the banner of a senior thesis. As a

part of the College Scholars major, I was granted the great privilege of building a curriculum for myself that best suited my academic and personal interests while an undergraduate. One of the few extra requirements for obtaining the College Scholars degree is to pursue a thesis of significant work and value relating to other subjects in my academic history. I began work on the project in the summer of 2003, gathering research and commencing with interviews, based in Memphis. Upon my return to Knoxville in August 2003, the work of organization began and I initiated the writing in early September, 2003.

The academic interests the project should reflect are History and Religion. This work is definitely a piece of local and human interest history, involving primary and secondary source material research, and my personal involvement with the subject which makes it an even more interesting historical endeavor. Because the community around Jay was mostly composed of people with a strong evangelical Christian worldview, there is no doubt that the work has value to anyone interested in communities of faith, and the way they deal with relationships on a personal and community level. The work does not delve deep into historical and religious theory, and does not propose to do so. Instead, the work is a creative piece meant to commemorate an individual, and also have autobiographical elements about myself in it, since the work is filled with my perceptions and my commentary on Jay and the effect he had on me.

There are many characters in this work that cannot be fully developed, due to the simple fact that Jay knew and interacted with so many people. The short characterizations may seem overly positive, or perhaps sometimes unrealistic. Jay (and I) always saw the glass as half full, and so the characters are portrayed in a light that Jay probably would

have seen them. Despite the succinct representation of those characters, I believe all of them are very close to reality and give an honest reflection of the roles they played in Jay's life.

The movement of the piece itself follows a loose chronology of the events or themes that marked uniqueness about Jay. The "songs," or chapters, fall in a loose order that hopefully covers major themes, such as Jay's love of sports or our family's many vacations, and places them into an order that flows towards and end. That end of course, will be his death, but also my thoughts about the effect of Jay upon his community, his family, and me. Some of the chapters are light-hearted and imitate a general light-heartedness about Jay that perpetrated almost everything he took part in. Other chapters, especially those towards the beginning or the end, can be heavier, but the birth and death of a handicapped child is a heavy matter, and should be written and read as such.

There are many people who have given help and encouragement along the way and should be acknowledged. First and foremost, my parents Hamp and Nancy, sister Clare, and brother Sam, who have continually encouraged me, prayed for me, read my writing, and continually listened to my crazy ideas for many years. My mother and father have modeled true love to each other and to their children in ways most parents and couples only dream about. I thank them for their outpouring of love and grace and their total trust in our Lord during all the hard and happy years with Jay. I am forever indebted to Dr. Kirsten Benson, my primary advisor at the University, who has given patient advice and cheerful guidance to me during the preparation and writing of this work, putting in her precious energy and thoughts towards making this piece much better than it would have been without her. I thank Dr. John Hodges, my secondary advisor, who has

also taken time out of his busy schedule to look at my work and give valuable commentary. There are numerous other people at the university who have participated as well either directly or indirectly. Dr. Robert Bast, Dr. Tom Heffernan, Dr. Thomas Broadhead, Dr. Mark Luprecht, Dr. Karen Levy, Dr. John Romeiser, and Dr. Bruce Wheeler; all of these members of the academic community at Tennessee have given serious thought and time to students, which is rare and to be applauded. Also, there are many friends and fellow students who encouraged me and also commented on my work, giving helpful feedback, and they know who they are. To all the people who spent energy either on sending me their thoughts, or telling them to me in an interview, and the unnamed others who loved and supported Jay during his life, Thank You. Last but not least, I thank Jay, whose story is worth telling. Solo Dei Gloria!

Drew Holcomb

November 3, 2003

The Velveteen Rabbit

Prologue

There we were on that quiet suburban Memphis street, almost the whole family. Uncle Steve and Aunt Paula came all the way from Chicago. A sea of little nieces and nephews were running around and disobeying in usual toddler fashion. I hardly remember it at all. I was only three, but the story told to me is easy to imagine. There we were in my parent's den, my grandfather the patriarch sitting regally on the couch, surrounded by two or three of his twenty-odd grandchildren, one of them probably commenting on his golden tanned bald head or that boisterous smile. It was a fine late Sunday afternoon and Uncle Steve, the youngest old person there, was strumming a few songs on the guitar. One song, the new 23rd Psalm, saying something like, "Guiding, Guarding all the way. He is everything that I need," the crowd's enthusiasm reflecting their strong dependence on faith in a loving Sovereign. That day was Father's Day, June 1985.

Grandchubby tells me what happened next. Mom, who was eight and a half months pregnant, asked him to read a book to everyone, mostly for the children but also for the parents as if they were remembering when he read to them as children.

Grandchildren were sitting at his feet on the floor, me somewhere amongst the crowd, probably next to my sister Clare. The parents sitting and standing crammed in the den, and so he read.

The story of The Velveteen Rabbit. The Velveteen Rabbit was just a stuffed little toy Rabbit, who wanted to be real, like the ones he saw out in the yard. It is a moving tale, and Grandchubby began to cry softly as he read about how the toy rabbit's legs did not work. His voice quivered while reading,

"[The Rabbit] was longing to dance, for a new tickly feeling ran through him, and he felt he would give anything in the world to be able to jump about like these rabbits did." Soon thereafter, many of the adults were crying with him, and he could barely finish the story. He tells me these days that as he read, he felt the reality of something terrible, some kind of tragedy that was about to happen.

Little did we know that two days later, on a normal Tuesday and what seemed to be a normal pregnancy, a great mystery would be revealed. This mystery was the birth of my little brother Jay, a velveteen rabbit of sorts, who we would learn later could never dance or jump like the other kids. It all seemed so sad and so crushing that God would allow such a precious gift to be so tainted by infirmity. In a moment, my parents, my sister and I, and so many who were a part of our community, were dubbed stewards, stewards of a beautifully tragic mystery.

We would now walk with him in suffering, care for him in need, laugh with him, cry with him, grow up with him, play with him, carry him, talk with him, teach him, travel with him, hold him, and love him until his days were no longer ours. Then, we would mourn his departure and celebrate his life.

These stories are the stories of a boy with a great spirit, a boy who embraced the reality of darkness by living brightly. A boy who told jokes with the best of them, who cheered on teams of young boys his own age who could do things his body would not allow. These are tales of his family, their adventures with a brother in a wheelchair. Here are the thoughts and stories of his friends, doctors, teachers, cousins, pastors, and caretakers. Here are the stories of dealing with hardship, walking through fire and relying on another broken son, the son who died young on Calvary. Here are the pains and joys of getting, having, and losing our little 'Jaybird,' and these are ***The Jaybird Songs***.

1. A Darkened Sunshine

Mom had been having contractions pretty often by three or four in the afternoon. By four forty my Grandmother, a devoted woman that us grandchildren call Grandmarje, had picked her up, dropped Clare and I off at the neighbors, and had taken her to the hospital. Most of the family was over at an aunt's house waiting for the good news of boy or girl and the weight and everything else we like to here about a newborn baby. Uncle Steve decided to go to the hospital because he had missed all his other nieces and nephews' births. Some other friends and family had come too, all waiting in the wings to celebrate. Dad pulled up about an hour later, and by this time Mom's water had broken, and they were putting her on the epidural. Dad, I assume walked in very calmly and confidently, ready to be the father of this new child, and Mom was in intense labor at this point, excited in spite of the pain, and because she was ready for her new baby. They moved to the delivery room by six twenty and at 6:36, on June 18th, 1985 Jay was born.

Every parent has fears that their child will have something go terribly wrong. There are some ironies about Jay's birth. When Dad was in dental school a few years earlier, he had studied Spina Bifida and had done ultrasounds on Clare and me to check out our spines. They did not think it was necessary on Jay. Mom had just finished some extended volunteer work with, Les Passes, a local charity that works with handicapped

children, and she had admitted weeks earlier that she did not think she could ever handle being the mother of a child with disabilities.

As the doctor took Jay out of the womb, something was immediately wrong. His color was ashen gray and he would barely cry. The nurse who was holding Jay pointed to his back at another nurse.

"Dr. Ruch, what is wrong with him?" Mom beckoned.

"He has a hole in his cord," he answered. My mother thought he was talking about his umbilical cord and said,

"Can't you just cut it off, since he doesn't need it anymore?" My Dad knew immediately that the hole was in his spinal cord. Fear gripped my mother and she began to plead with God, "please take him home if something is wrong."

I am sure that those who were waiting outside began to get nervous, still no word from the delivery room. Dad finally rolled Mom out there with them and he spoke softly and courageously,

"We have a beautiful baby boy but he has some serious problems." Dr. Ruch followed shortly after with his head slightly bowed,

"Hamp and Nancy, Jay has been born with Spina-Bifida." No one except Grandchubby and Dad knew what it was, but it sounded so horrible.

Dr. Ruch continued, "He will have problems with his lower limb functions, bladder and rectal control, at minimum. We will be taking him to Lebonhuer Children's Hospital immediately." Dad went up to see him, and Mom went to recovery, crying out to her mother in a moment of great despair,

"Mom, pray that the Lord would take him home if he's going to suffer." My Grandmother, in her typical tough love fashion answered back,

"Nancy, I will pray God's will for this baby." Dad said he wanted him even if he had to hang him on a peg in the living room, that's how bad he wanted this boy. Mom felt the same way too I think, she just could not bear the thought of such suffering for her child and for herself.

Mama Lou, my Dad's mother, came in to comfort, and so did my great grandmother "Granny," that faithful soul. Dad came in to kiss Mom and she told him how proud she was that he was going to be this baby's father.

"This baby has a name, and his name is Jay. Call him by his name." Mamalou responded, putting an important name with his tiny face.

They left mom in the room there by herself. As she sat there alone, a couple of nurses brought Jay into the room for her to see and hold. There in that small dimly lit hospital room sat a broken mother holding her little broken baby boy, with little chocolate brown curls and skin as soft as the clouds. Shattered but thankful she prayed, "Lord, I want him so bad, no matter what's wrong. Please watch over him for me."

By the time Dad got downtown to Lebonhuer, there was already a gathering of loved ones. People from church, aunts, uncles, cousins, pastors, and many others were there. They were waiting in one of those sterile looking hospital wings with generic furniture and hard tiled floors. Some were sitting and praying, others talking quietly to one another. Dad walked in and a few of the gathered immediately embraced him, some with manly handshakes and brisque hugs, others told him they were praying, and some

stayed silently away, content just to be there and encourage from a distance, unsure of what to say or do.

By this time Jay was in the Special Care Unit at Lebonhuer, waiting for a prognosis and decisions from the family. My father is a man who makes decisions wisely and confidently without wasting time. He does things that he thinks are best but not necessarily the most pleasing to people. He loves deeply, but he takes responsibility very seriously. It is providential how God chose to give Jay to him, so he could receive the best care and the deepest of love.

This care and love started at Lebonhuer that night. Knowing hardly anything about Spina Bifida and its effects, Dad walked into a meeting with the Senior Nuerosurgery Resident, thinking Jay's worst outlook would be walking with braces and having no control over his bowels. The Doctor, in the most honest terms possible, said,

"Your son is never going to walk. He will have no control over his bowels. He will never have bladder control, and based on where his paralysis starts, he will most likely have bad nerve enervation, incapacitating him for most normal body functions. This means his kidneys will not function well, he will most likely be hydro-cephalic, which is water on the brain,"

"Well, can't you do a shunt for that."

"Yes, we can, but they don't always work and we get a lot of infections from those. He will almost assuredly be mentally retarded. This child will have a lot of complications."

He went on to explain that there were really only two options for our family, the first being to leave Jay alone and let things run their course and forego surgery or be aggressive and try to save and extend his life. Dad then asked him,

"So you are basically saying that we can let him sit up here until he dies of infection or body function failure, or we can go for it and try to make this kid's life work?"

"Yes, those are basically the options."

I cannot imagine the weight of such responsibility, but knowing what I know now, I also know there is no question as to my Dad's response. 'Be aggressive,' I am sure he said. 'Be very aggressive. This is my child, please do everything to give him life.'

All the friends and family looked up patiently as Dad slowly walked toward them with the heartwrenching news of Jay's prognosis. He tells me now how strange it was that the women sat there, mostly looking down and praying, so sad to hear of Jay's conditions, trying to comprehend what it meant for our family. The men wanted to know more. It was ironic how many doctors stood there, all of Dad's dental school buddies, Grandchubby and Uncle Rad both general surgeons. They stood there with the highest education the world has to offer, and yet they could not fix Jay. They asked Dad for all the details, they comforted him, and they left him to drive back to Mom to share the pain together, alone for the first time.

As he walked down a lonely aisle toward the parking lot, there was a solitary bathroom there by the door. Inside it had ugly yellow walls and commercial sinks, mirrors, and toilets. He tells me how he went in there and fell apart with his head in his

hands, tears bellowing down his face. My Dad's face quivers when he cries, and I did not see it much during Jay's life, but there in that bathroom he wept. It became a place where he would continue to go in the following years either after a long conversation with a doctor after a night of surgery, or simply after the agony of watching his son's little body filled time and time again with countless needless and drugs and tests. This bathroom was a place of sorrow, a place of reconciliation with a God whom he trusted, but did not always understand. A few years after Jay's young death, the bathroom is now gone, replaced in a renovation. It was there for all of Jay's nearly fourteen years and twenty something surgeries. A place where Dad decided that Jay and the life that went along with him was not a dream, but a reality. It was the reality that his son was desperately in need of his father's love, help, heart, and soul. Dad desperately filled that need.

It was a long drive from Lebonhuer back to Baptist Hospital, where Mom was waiting. She had been grieving this sudden shift in existence that Jay's birth had caused. "How am I to cope? How I can bring home a handicapped child to Clare and Drew?" So many clouded thoughts were bleeding through her mind. Friends had been there all day, Mom still trying to entertain as she always does. Then by herself she sunk herself in the Gideon Bible there in the room, crying out to God to be faithful to her, singing "guiding, guarding all the way, he is everything that I need..." Dad walked in, fell on the bed with her, and they wept. They read 1 Corinthians 4:1, "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

"I don't want to fall asleep. I'm scared I'll dream this is all a dream and I'll wake up and have to face it again." Dad whispered there in the darkness.

2. "Jay", Spina Bifida, and the Journey of Faith

Reverend Letey says that when he was told that this new son of the Holcomb's was to be named after him, he immediately felt honored and humbled. His name was to be carried not by a handsome athlete or rising intellect but a boy who was hours away from the first of twenty-five plus surgeries. A boy whose life span was unknown, without any surety of his physical or mental status. He wrote,

"Jay is a living example to all of us that our life is not about our abilities, appearance, resources, personality or any other human feature...It is about a sovereign gracious God having His way in manifesting Himself through an earthen vessel in the way that he chooses."

Our family did not choose Jay. We did not choose to have a son and brother who might never have a date, get a job, talk, go fishing with us, or even be able to go to school. We did not choose the pain of watching him suffer through surgery year after year, physical therapy and doctor's appointments week after week. And yet now, the validity of his life is unquestionable. Jay made melodies sweeter, jokes funnier, vacations more entertaining, and life more worth living. It could not have been mere chance that so much good came out of so much bad. It must have been a Divine who was busy, busy

putting together a beautiful story, one where love would triumph over pain, and joy over sadness.

Jay was just what we needed, and we were just what he needed. After that dreadful first night at the hospital, Dad awoke the next morning to come home and tell Clare and me the news. We were sitting on the porch on the side of the red brick house with the summer green lawn. She was four, and I was three. She was very motherly, and I was just a typical fun-loving toddler. We knew we were supposed to have a brother by now, but Dad came home empty handed. Clare smiled with that big dimply grin and curly dark hair. I stared stoically, ready for Dad to start talking.

"Clare and Drew, you have a little brother, but he has some complications" I definitely did not know what complications were at that age.

"So what does that mean?"

"He was born with a hole in his little back, and I don't think his legs are going to work."

"Does that mean he wont be able to ride a tricycle?" I asked.

"No Drew, he won't be able to ride a tricycle."

"That's ok, he can ride on the back of mine with me." And that was the way it was going to be for me. I was going to carry this kid, play with him like I would have if his legs worked. In my mind, I guessed that since his legs wouldn't work, he could just use mine whenever he wanted.

Clare was more understanding of the reality. She looked so stunned, and she determined that she would take care of me, and be a big girl and help Mom and Dad out as much as any four year old could.

Like Mom and Dad and the other friends and family, we learned that this would be a journey of overwhelming grief at times, but also great faith. None of us understood Spina Bifida that well either. Our family doctor, who was at the hospital soon after Jay's birth, explained it. Spina Bifida is a birth defect where there is a hole in the spinal cord, causing nerve paralysis. In other words, the nerves did not work below Jay's chest, causing his legs, bladder, and midsection to be paralyzed. There are different degrees of Spina Bifida, Jay's was not the worst, but it was not far from it.

We learned how the world sees the Jay's of society. They are usually cast out, and they used to be a sign of bad genes and a source of familial embarrassment. Handicapped children could be considered useless to society, and so many people choose to abort babies who will have physical or mental difficulties. What a loss to our world when we become so sure that healthiness is only a physical state and miss the emotional and metaphysical health of humanity and community. It was apparent from the beginning that we would share Jay, share in taking care of him, share in his witty humor and personality that we did not yet know about, and share in the simple pleasure of knowing him.

There in those first few days with Jay, We started down a road. It was a road that had many curves and bumps and near falls. But it was a road where we saw hope, we met love, we laughed and cried, and we embraced faith.

3. An Uncle's Prayer

That first day was such a roller coaster. Everyone had been ready to celebrate the birth of another healthy child. No one in our late family history had had any serious health problems yet. Then all of a sudden this terrible news, and it seemed to get worse. First it was complications, then they said nerve damage, then paralysis, then potential retardation, then the probable vocal cord paralysis. My Uncle Steve remembers it well. He is the youngest of five siblings, just after my mother. A big guy who has a quiet presence, he is a preacher who was a seminary student during those years. Everyone looks up to him because he has a lot of wisdom and encouragement, and I remember that he was never scared to cry. His presence there for Jay's birth meant a lot to Mom, because they were so close growing up. But there he was, ready to support that happy day, and yet it turned out to be "a joyful event turned into the beginning of a nightmare," to use his own words.

He went home that night so angry at God for doing this to his sister and her family. "Lord, what are you doing in all this? How can it be?" He cried, frustrated in prayer. He prayed two things, which in retrospect were prophetic. It was two in the morning and he begged God to give Jay the mind to comprehend the love of Christ and the ability to verbally express that love. I have talked to many people who knew and

encountered Jay during his short span of life and all of them reiterated these two things. First that Jay taught them and modeled to them the love of God. Secondly, that Jay loved to talk, that he loved to sing with his nearly paralyzed vocal cords, that he loved to talk on the phone, and that he was most interested in verbally expressing himself. In the words of my Grandfather, Jay was "a talking po' soul."

This simple prayer foreshadowed things to come and reflected a family and community that trust not in human devices but in divine goodness. Grandmarje tells me two beautiful Bible stories that about the love and trust of God that mirror Jay's life.

Moses, when God called him to go to Egypt to release Israel from slavery, pleads with God not to send him, saying,

"But I am slow of speech and of tongue." The Lord answered him,

"Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now, therefore go and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak."

The second story is the one of Jesus encountering the blind man.

"Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind," the Pharisees asked him.

"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." Jesus replied.

It was here where they all took hope early on. I took it on too as early as I can remember. Jay was not born crippled because of chance or because of my parent's sin. No, we believed it went a lot deeper than that. Jay was crippled so that lives would be transformed by the outworking labor of love shown to him and flowing from him. He was

crippled so people he encountered would be blessed in ways that would not have been if he was healthy. Jay was crippled so we could understand suffering, comprehend pain, and know what it meant to seize the day. Like my Uncle verbalized in a prayer that barren night, Jay was crippled so we could know the love of God and with our lips give Him praise.

4. Silent Tears

"Dad, why are you crying?" I asked innocently as he was laboring in the kitchen. He didn't answer me so I asked again.

"Dad, why are you crying?" Still he didn't answer.

"Are you sad about baby Jay?" His face was drawn up to me by then and he replied,

"Yes, son, but also I don't like fixing breakfast." He said it laughing through tears and so we laughed too, Mom lying on the couch in the den with Clare.

We wanted Jay back from the hospital so bad. It had only been three or four days but that was long enough. Dad had said the day before that he kept feeling a tug to return to the hospital, that we were incomplete without Jay. Clare had burst into tears to Mom,

"I want you to bring him home today...and make sure you tell him my name is Clare Holcomb, just like his." That night Mom sang us to sleep with old hymns, the ones she loved.

That is how it went for those first 10 days, going back and forth from the hospital, watching Jay recover, touching his little body as he sat there with needles in his arms and legs, tubes all over him, and a big yellow patch on his back from the surgery.

Grandchubby and Grandmargie would come and stay for a while. Grandpa and Mamalou

came and they encouraged us despite their broken hearts for Jay and for our family. Dad went three times a day, just to watch over Jay.

Even as a baby, Jay was so calm. Lying there seemingly patient for his wounds to heal, only days from being able to go home. He didn't cry much and he slept a lot.

Friends took care of Clare and me. There were daily meetings with doctors. They were going to have to insert a shunt to relieve the water on the brain. There was also a false sense of hope as people watched Jay's legs. Maybe they were moving or maybe he had some nerve capability. But through it all there was patience.

Mom and Dad didn't get to hold Jay untilten days after his birth, "hugging him, kissing him, and rocking him for over an hour."

He came home on July the 7th, my new brother. He wasn't home long though before he had to go back in for the shunt surgery, a little three-week old baby in for his second major surgery. Mom was still grieving the pain of having to deal with such suffering. The surgery went well but Dr. Sanford, who was always so faithful to Jay's well being and to my parents being involved with all the medical aspects of Jay's life, had told them that their could be future problems with his central nervous system.

Jay was home again a few days later, and now he had those little bumps on his head that felt like a road map. The smooth tube from the shunt ran under his scalp and we could trace it with our hands. Clare and I finally had our little baby to play with, bumps on his head and everything. We loved that boy, his cheeks were little pillows and his eyes were wide open looking at us. In the eyes of a three year old, the big scars on his back were kind of cool.

July was eventful. Mom fell down the stairs with Jay in her arms and he landed on the hard wooden floor. This was adding trauma to tragedy and it didn't make things easier on her already aching heart. A sheriff from nearby Crittendon County called one morning to ask if Dad owned a blue Buick and if he knew where it was.

"Hopefully out in front of my house," he answered. It had been stolen, wheels jacked, broken windows, speakers, golf clubs, and shotgun stolen out of the trunk.

August started out with a trip to Gulf Shores on the sun-tanned Alabama coast. It was a Dental trip that Dad had organized and Jay was going just like the rest of us. It was the beginning of including and sharing him everywhere we went. Granny, that brave soul with an aged-humped back and silver hair, took care of Jay most of the week. Clare and I were so proud of him, showing him to all the other kids, and telling them how special he was. We made sand castles and swam with floaties. All the men played in the golf tournament and I wanted to be older so I could play. Clare was bossing me around and being sassy to Mom, but I still followed her everywhere. It was our first family trip with Jay and it wouldn't be the last.

We kept living and Jay just came along. His first smile came a few weeks later, and that was joyful. At the beginning of September we went out to the White's farm, an old family haunt where we went dove hunting every fall. It was there that my parents realized something was wrong with Jay's breathing.

Jay was wheezing a lot and having to work hard to get air in his lungs. We went home early and drove straight to Dr. Geshke's house. He was the family doctor, a quiet tender man with a heart as deep as the ocean, and carries a steady smile that makes all the children he cares for feel so safe. We woke him up but he didn't mind. He told us to put

him near a humidifier and call if the breathing didn't improve. It didn't and by eleven that night Jay was back at Lebonhuer.

Dr. Geshke drove from his home all the way downtown to help. They didn't find anything in the X-rays but something was wrong. Jay was gasping for air and every breath he struggled for his chest would cave in, his lungs desperate for oxygen. There was a high probability for a tracheostomy, where a tube protrudes the neck and through the trachea, enabling breathing. This was a stark reality. With a trach, Jay would have no vocal capability. How would he verbally express himself without a voice? Would he talk? Would he laugh? Would he cry? The doctors decided a trach was the best option, and so at nearly three months old, Jay lost his voice.

There were many fears about a trach, including the possibility of pneumonia, a common occurrence with tracheotomies. After the surgery, Dr. Lazar, a new ENT doctor in town, who had a newborn himself, came in and told my parents that there was a slight chance that Jay might have a hoarse whisper later in life. He said to Mom,

"Kids with traches do fine."

Mom didn't appreciate the insensitive comment so she answered him back,

"That doesn't make it any easier. How would you like it if you heard your two week old baby needed a trach?" He realized his mistake saying,

"I would not like it very much." Everyone had told us how terrible a trach would be, doctors, family, everyone had an opinion.

Jay was in Intensive getting used to the trach, and when Dad walked in he noticed that Jay was still breathing hard. His breath was stridering, lying on his back using his

whole diaphragm to grab every bit of air. Dad and Mom looked over at the young resident and said,

"Excuse me, what is going on over here?"

"Oh, he is just stridering and we gave him a Racine breathing treatment and he should be fine," the resident answered very nonchalantly and turned back around to the nurse he was conversing with. Dad was as mad as a snake.

"That's interesting. He has had four Racine breathing treatments this week, he just had a trach put in. We left here at five o'clock and he was not stridering then."

"Oh, he will be fine," the young doctor responded in a proud manner. This resident was what doctors call a ninety-day wonder. Ninety days out of some impressive medical school and thinking he knows everything. After his last comment, Dad simply sidestepped him and went to the senior resident to tell him that he thought the trach was out of place. Dr. Lazar was there in less than ten minutes and sure enough the internal part of the trach had fallen out of the trachea. They fixed it and Jay started breathing again.

As soon as Jay was out of the hospital, we moved into the Walts' house. The Walts' were family friends who were going to spend a year in China and they let us house sit for a year. It was a stately white house with a tennis court and climbing trees and lots of grass. In other words, it was a paradise for Clare and me. They set up the humidifier and suction material for Jay's trach at the end of Mom and Dad's bed. They also learned CPR in case something went wrong, and Granny, at 86 years old, learned it too.

There was a trip coming up that had been planned since before Jay was born. Dad and his buddy, Chuck Neal, called it the mystery retreat. Ten couples gave them money and they planned a short trip, this time to Highlands, North Carolina, and no one knew where they were going except Dad and Chuck. After the trach was put in, Mom wanted to cancel. Dad refused because a handicap wasn't keeping Jay and the family from living on. Dad was wise to take him. All the friends were wary of this child with a tube in his neck, but after the trip they were all used to Jay, having partaken in caring for him and watching him be suctioned. They hiked with Jay like a papoose on Dad, and Mom backpacked the suction gear. They stopped mid-trail on the mountain and suctioned him. Jay had had the trach for less than three days and already he had taken a three mile hike. Some people said Dad lost his mind, and if that is a measure of it, he never got it back, because we kept taking Jay everywhere. Jay wasn't a freak, we were a normal family, and life went on.

Back at home, Mom suctioned, Dad worked, Clare and I played, Jay started growing up and we were having a ball, despite the difficulties. Mom wore a little plastic Fisher-Price monitor on her hip at all times to tell if Jay was breathing well. Dad used to play tricks on her with it, making farting noises from Jay's bedroom when she had company over. Jay learned from it I think and as soon as he learned to make noises those were the first.

Jay had to be suctioned twice an hour through the trach to get rid of the mucus and keep the passage clean. Mom was learning how to do it and many friends learned too so she could take a break every once in a while. Mrs. Linda Meadows a nurse and friend

of Mom's, learned to suction Jay, and so did Mrs. Harriet Laughlin, and they came every week to give Mom a needed break.

The part of the trach inside his neck had to be changed every five days or so and only Dad and Mary Francis knew how to do it. Mary Francis is the sweet black lady that helped Mom take care of us growing up. She deserves a chapter of her own and it will have to come later. Dad wanted to teach Mom how to change the filter but she refused. So, in usual Hamp Holcomb fashion, he forced her into it in case Jay was ever in an emergency. He took it out and said he wasn't putting in the new one.

"I'm not going to do it."

"Nancy, Jay is not breathing until you do it."

"I can't do it!"

"Nancy, put the piece into the trach, now." He looked calm but inside he was getting nervous, about to take over.

Mom was crying and she called him an ass, which meant she was really mad. But she finally did it and it maybe saved Jay's life.

That is what it took sometimes, tough love. I learned a lot about love watching Mom and Dad take care of us, and take care of Jay, and take care of each other. It was a team effort to be a family, and Dad was a good coach, Mom was a good encourager, and Clare and I always wanted to be a part. There at the Walts' Clare and I figured out how to play with each other without bothering mom. We put Jay in a little car Santa had brought at Christmas and we got all the chairs and toys in the house and played trains. There were GI Joe's and Cowboys and Indians and every game possible. She would play my games

and I would play teahouse, as long as there was no Barbie. Whatever we did, we put Jay right in the middle of it, like he was our favorite toy, always smiling or laughing.

Jay couldn't cry though, and that hurt me the worst. Because of his trach he couldn't make any noise when he cried. There was just that look on his face, and tears rolling down his soft cheeks, but no sound except the forced air coming out of the trach. Silent tears are all we saw from our baby brother Jay. Looking back on it, I wonder if he cried those silent tears even after he miraculously gained back speech and the trach was gone. He hardly ever cried about his pain, he never lamented his condition, always joyful, friendly, and reaching out to others instead of looking painfully at himself. There are only two times we remember when he was verbally frustrated that his legs didn't work. Once with Dad in the car driving through Arkansas when he was eight he kept banging his bony leg against the car door.

"I can't believe you can't find one doctor who can fix my legs."

Then to Mom when she was so frustrated with him one day, a friend told her just to go hold him and tell him how much she loved him.

"Jay, momma loves you so much, and she knows how hard it must be for you."

"Why do I have to be handicapped, Mom?" He burst into tears, sobbing real tears, not the silent ones. I think we cried more than he did, at least on the outside. I don't know how hard it was to be stuck there in that wheelchair, immobile and different. I wonder how much he cried those silent tears, how often he asked why?

5. Upon Younger Days

After those early days where everything was so busy and so complicated, everyday life seemed to slow down for our family, or at least it seemed to be more normal. Jay was a typical growing baby, except that he had the trach. Clare and I were a lot of fun, but a lot of trouble, too. Dad was working hard as a Dentist, and Mom was taking care of us and staying involved in a lot of other stuff like bible studies.

That first Thanksgiving we made our yearly pilgrimage to Murphy, North Carolina, where the maternal side of Dad's family lived. Uncle Dan let us sit on top of his cows and I was so enamored with his Red Man chew and sagging lips from a couple of bouts with lip cancer, but he kept on chewing. They ran a little side of the highway gas station and lived in the house connected to it. We'd sit there with their space heaters and drink bottled Coca Cola and chew on bubble gum, staring at all the local characters that made their morning stop for cigarettes or a gallon of milk and a tank of gas.

That was the first time they all met Jay and they took a hesitated liking to him. Little did they know that year after year we would return with him and he would slowly steal their hearts. Mimmaw, my great grandmother, ran the show, or at least she wanted to. She lived in an old stone houses with a red barn next to it, and her black 1940's Buick was rusting in the weeds that grew all around it. She took good care of us, cooking bacon

and eggs and turning her little TV on to the Macy's parade. The adults stayed up late and played Rook. We were supposed to be asleep but never were. Jay would crawl with us to sneak a peek through the stairwells and watch them, nearly ten or twelve of them, play cards till our eyelids were sliding to sleep. Then we made our way back to the old wooden beds.

Uncle Jerry loved us the most I think, or maybe he just loved to entertain us. He took care of all the mountain land he and his two sisters, one of them being my grandmother, had inherited. He had hair as white as snow and one leg was shorter than the other one from a construction accident, but it was more fun to tell people it was from a war or something similar. He drove us around the hills on dusty gravel roads lounging in the back of his truck, until we arrived at the "old place," where fishing and shooting and riding his World War Two army jeep were the days' activities. I bet that first time with Jay there Mimmaw probably warned him against taking us up there in the hills with that big swing that went so high above the creek, and those mean dogs I thought would bite my legs off. But just like everything else, we let Jay join in all the fun and usual life that the rest of us lived.

Going to Murphy that year in some ways marked to me the fact that this new brother of mine was just another addition to an already lively gang of people. At Christmas, Mom's family loved on him, held him, talked about how good God was to have brought him through so many trials already. Uncle Steve and Aunt Paula were there and they brought their new baby Lyndee, who was born after they had been told they would not be able to have any children. There was a lot of reason for rejoicing. Grandchubby, Uncle John, and Uncle Rad put Jay in the middle of the family and they

thanked God for him, and prayed that his life would be a testimony to the love of God the Father in sending his son Jesus Christ. They thanked Him for answering prayers and being gracious to us and giving us family and friends and these new children to love on and grow up with.

Growing up is what we did. I started being the child that asks a million questions and Clare got more motherly. We spent countless hours playing and fighting. One morning Mom said to me,

"Now Drew, you and Clare aren't going to fight today are you?" I answered her bluntly,

"Yeah, we're going to fight and fight and fight and fight." I said in my little tough three-year old voice. We made some great family pictures at the Walts' too. Jay had to wear a body brace because of the paralysis, and he looks like his sitting up straight, but really it was just plastic molding. Clare didn't like it because she couldn't feel her little brother when she held him.

We had toy Jeeps that we drove him around in and played all sorts of games. Clare would suck on his soft cheeks when Mom wasn't around and make Jay laugh. After a year in the Walts' house, Mom and Dad found a rental house for us to live in. It was in a quiet neighborhood in Memphis where a lot of other young people and young families lived, on Waynoka Street.

I remember those first days very well. To my parents, the first few weeks were a nightmare because the stove didn't work, then the washing machine was broken, and the backyard was a landscaping disaster. There were vines as long as the house and poison ivy too. To Clare and me, it was heaven. There was an overgrown dog cage in the back of

the yard and the first afternoon we found a metal tin full of 'treasures' that we were so proud of. There were old credit cards and coins and other random things of no value to an adult, but a week of pleasure and conversation for any sane child.

Jay was over a year old, but he was tiny, barely weighing more than eleven or twelve pounds. Earlier that year, the spring of '86, Dr. Lazar told us that he saw movement in Jay's vocal cords, which was a miracle. Mom and Dad, and others who helped take care of Jay, started practicing breathing treatments that made him use his vocal cords. It was a long, painful, and arduous process since those muscles were completely undeveloped.

In the mean time, Mom became unexpectantly pregnant with baby number four, little Sam. There they were, with three little kids, one needing constant attention, trying to get out of financial debt, living in a rental house, and scared to death that Sam would have Spina Bifida too. Well, Clare and I were excited regardless because another child meant another person to play with and harass. We learned how to play together there in those months waiting on Sam and still having Jay. We got a trampoline while we were on Waynoka and we'd put Jay on it and bounce him around and he would smile and laugh silently. We rode our bikes, played wiffleball, dug around in the dirt and were kids.

One of my favorite childhood memories was the day that Jay got his trach out. Through all the hard work of teaching his vocal cord muscles how to work, the Doctors believed that the trach was not necessary anymore. It made me so happy because the saddest thing to me was that my little brother couldn't talk like the other babies. When Mom told me that he would be able to talk, my heart burst with delight. Someone from the pharmaceutical company came by to pick up the suctioning machine and I remember

running the accessories out to his van as if I had just found the keys to unlock a slave, and in many ways that was the truth, Jay would no longer be a slave to paralyzed vocal cords.

His first word was, "Momma" and he said it with a smile. A month after the trach was taken out, "Momma" had her fourth, a brawny, strong, and healthy boy, aptly named Samuel. It is amazing how different four children from the same parents can. Sam, as we called him, was always the energetic one, who probably would not have gotten enough attention if his personality hadn't demand it. He was fiery from day one, crying loudly when he was upset and laughing with the same vigor if he was happy. I loved having two younger brothers, Jay there encouraging, Sam always participating. I picked on him the most, because it made him so mad. Clare was the mom of the bunch, and she became affectionately known as "Sissy" by her three little brothers who adored her. She could boss us around and tattle tale with the best of them, but sooner or later she usually got in trouble too, and we boys smiled at that.

Clare and I were thrilled to have Sam, and we would argue over who got to take care of who as if we were even capable. Jay was learning to talk and could say a few things by then. I watched a home video of Mom and us kids at swimming pool with some other friends of hers and their kids. Little Richard and I were learning to swim and mom was doing her best to pay attention to us. Clare, the Hatch twins, and Jenny Meadows were being silly and laughing in the shallow end by the steps. In his little floating contraption was Jay, being held by Mom. He looked intimidated, and I never remember him being all that comfortable with swimming, probably because he couldn't swim. His cheeks were still fat like a baby's and his little hands were paddling around the water and Mom asked him in her baby voice,

"Jay, who loves you?"

"Momma," he answered. She was trying to get him to say Mrs. Debbie's name, who was holding the camera faithfully.

"Jay, who else loves you?" she said.

"Debbie," he said quietly but surely and looked up at the camera.

There was hardly any jealousy from Jay towards Sam. Looking back on it now, it was probably because somehow he saw that baby as his brother, just like I had seen him a year and a half earlier, someone to play with and grow up with, and also someone to help take care of him. Mom gave all of us little tasks to help with Jay, whether that meant simply wiping off his chin after a meal, or playing with play-dough or legos with him.

Those years in some ways stream together, because life wasn't really different to me. I hardly remember my life before Jay, and growing up with him was never something new or something strange. We shared a room together, all four of us there on Waynoka. As soon as Jay learned to crawl, he was crawling all over the house and I loved to crawl down there with him and try to race him. He wore that big body brace that sounded like wood when you knocked on it, and it had those soft cloth pieces that wrapped around his little torso so he wouldn't get sores. His hair grew and it grew curly and it grew dark brown, and it looked nice sitting on top of his oval face, balloon cheeks, and bucked teeth. For as long as I remember he had on glasses too, the round kind that made him look curious and sometimes mischievous. Mary Frances was over all the time to help Mom and we learned to love her like a second mother.

We moved out of Waynoka in November of that year, 1987, and moved to a house that would be our home for over ten years. That house was on Cedarwood Drive,

five houses down from Grandmargie and Grandchubby, which meant five houses down from endless closets and attics and hideaways and picture books and Shirley Temple movies and sitting on their laps and hearing stories. Cedarwood meant climbing trees and riding go-karts but those are thoughts for another chapter.

Jay's life, like the rest of ours, was moving onward, and Mom and Dad saw it that way too. We had come to grips with the fact that he was born unable to walk and that meant a life of difficulty and a life of oftentimes sadness. But as we grew up during those early times, Jay began to talk often and much, he began to love people and make them laugh. He started to develop a deep and open personality that would win countless of admirers and friends to his side. He was an integral part of family that traveled together, laughed together, prayed together, and a group of siblings that lived together, got into deep trouble and spankings together.

Jay became a Coach, a friend, a fan, a traveler, a patient, a musician, a brother, a son, and most importantly he became the boy that lived as bright as the noonday sun.

6. Cocktail Hour

When Uncle Steve prayed that Jay would be able to verbally express himself, I don't think he knew what he was asking and how seriously that prayer would be answered. As soon as his vocal cords were working, his mouth started spewing forth words like a water fountain shooting water. Jay had lots of stories, some true and some false, band he wasn't scared to tell either kind. An off-color comment could be heard not far behind, and the telephone was his best friend.

He got an electric wheelchair sometime when he was three or four and he would wheel himself around a crowd of people at a ballgame or a church function and talk people's ears off. One day when he was in the hospital for a surgery, he rolled out of the hospital room and they found him chatting at the front desk with all the nurses and office workers, telling them tall tales or asking questions about their lives, whether they were married, if their husband was nice to them, how they liked working for the hospital, and whatever popped into his mind.

When I rolled him around church after the main service, it was a sea of "hello Jay" and "How are you little man?" from what seemed like everyone we passed, and he knew most of them by name.

Jay never met a stranger. When he was still very young, probably four, he and Sam spent a couple of days with Grandpa and Mamalou down in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, on the Gulf Coast. They put the two boys in a double stroller and rolled them through a shopping mall. Grandpa was pushing the stroller and Mamalou shopped. Sam was asleep and Grandpa noticed that everyone that walked by Jay got a "hi" and a wave from him. He was especially friendly to the black people there, probably because of Mary Frances. They went into a store where Mamalou had found something to purchase. The sales clerk was a middle aged black lady and Jay said to her,

"What's your name?" She told him and asked him his name.

"What time is it?" He said, which bewildered her by this point. But she told him the time and then he asked,

"What's your daddy's name?" She said,

"His name is John. Do you know him?"

"No, just tell him I said hello." Jay finished.

Alongside his questions and ramblings, Jay started getting a reputation at a very young age for making up the most outrageous tales of his supposed escapades that he probably pieced together from listening to other people talk and watching the TV. Kevin Johnston, one of my Dad's business partners for many years, use to hear many of these stories. Kevin is a patient man who let Jay talk and talk and even let him call him on the phone at work. When Jay wanted an adults attention he would say, "Hey Kevin (or whoever the lucky listener was), come here," as he tugged on their pants leg or jacket. Then he would cover one side of his mouth and begin a story.

"Hey Kev, you are never gonna believe this. Yesterday, Drew and Sam and Grandchubby were playing baseball and Drew pitched the ball, and I hit a home run and I was running the bases, and I slid into home. Then Grandchubby hit after me and he hit a home run and it hit a car and then we all ran and drove off real fast." I don't know if ever told this exact story but it is pretty typical of the ones he did tell, and it was obvious he made them up as he went along, just dragging people with him. It was almost like some kind of fantasy world. We found out later it is actually a syndrome called cocktail hour syndrome where kids make up wild stories all the time.

He also told farting and pooping stories. My grandmother probably won't be too happy that I wrote these but they were an integral part of Jay's personality. Part of the reason he told those stories was to push the envelope a little and see how much he could get away with. He loved to tell everyone how Dad had farted in front of someone or how he had messed his britches, saying, "A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do," one of Jay's favorite catch phrases.

He quoted movies, especially ***Tommy Boy***, and ***Father of the Bride***, laughing so hard after his monologues, bending over in his chair and slapping his knees as his face squinted up in hysterics. Like most of our family, he was never afraid to laugh at his own stories and jokes, a lack of self-consciousness that made others feel comfortable around him.

There were a few stories that were his favorite, because they never failed to entertain. One year we decided to go to Disneyworld, which is a little out of the norm for our family because Dad likes to go places where he can drive around and tour small towns and historical sights, as well as have activities planned. However, we had never

been to Disneyworld and Clare and I were in high school, so we decided to go. It was a blast for sure, and Jay loved it. We grew up with Dad making us learn to like, then later love, the thrill rides. Disneyworld was no different. The first day we went to MGM studios and got in line for the Tower of Terror. Jay would do these rides but he would get nervous and start to get a little quiet in anticipation. The wait seemed like two hours and when we finally got near the place where you actually get on the machine that goes through the ride, we realized we were going to be riding with a group of about eight to ten high school age black girls, who were so nervous and loud and cracking us up. We got on the ride and Jay sat in between Mom and Dad, with Clare, Sam, and I sitting in front of them, and the black girls were spread out in the other rows. We started moving up the 'elevator' shaft and it was pitched black darkness.

"Oh, Lord, it is dark in here!" one of the girls shouted. We started moving in the dark and the music was intense and another one of them screamed,

"Oh, Jesus! We Moving!" by this time Jay was intrigued and laughing, but still a little nervous about the drop. We moved forward in the darkness and a huge door opened, and we saw that we were high above the ground looking over the theme park. We dropped eleven stories, and the screaming intensified. The ride takes you back up immediately and you go down another six stories, back up, then all the way back down. The ride moved our stomachs to our noses and printed smiles and looks of amazement on our faces. Right when we stopped at the bottom, one of the girls yelled,

"OH JESUS! I done peed on myself!" and we erupted and Jay never quit telling that story till the day he died.

Later that week another event stuck with him that he always told during his cocktail hours. There were limited handicapped bathroom facilities and so Dad had to take Jay in a stall in the men's bathroom to change him and catheterize him. Jay's bowels were not very functional and Mom or Dad had to put on a latex glove and go "digging for gold" as we called it, but really it meant just digging for doo doos. After a fiasco where Jay ended up in the toilet bowl, everything got cleaned up and Dad opened the stall door to wheel Jay out to meet back with us. There on the wall of urinals stood a grown man with Downs Syndrome who had dropped his pants and underwear to the floor. The bathroom was rather large and full of men but it was silent due to the awkwardness of a grown man's naked butt showing to everyone. When Dad rolled Jay past the man, he said out loud,

"MAN! That's the hairiest butt I have ever seen!" Dad hurried Jay out as fast as he could, mortified but also trying to hold in his laughter.

Some of Jay's stories are almost a folklore tradition with people who knew him. Everyone has their favorite Jay story, usually heard from the horse's mouth in earlier years. The two Disneyworld ones were some of his favorites, then the one about Mom wetting her pants in laughter in San Francisco, but I will get to that later. Some of the most memorable ones are the ones that reflect the way Jay was no respecter of persons. One of my favorites was a time we were eating dinner at Shoney's with some friends. At that time, Anfernee Hardaway was in his last year playing basketball for the Memphis Tigers, about to be drafted for the NBA. He sat down with a friend at Shoney's about six feet from Jay. Sam and I were so excited that he was sitting there, but Jay wasn't content with that and he unlocked his wheelchair brakes and rolled over to him and starting

asking him questions. Dad didn't realize it until it was too late and Jay and Anfernee were already in a full conversation.

Another favorite is the time that Jay got to meet Itzak Perlman, arguably the world's finest concert violinist. Jay had been taking violin lessons from Mrs. Rita, a dear Russian lady who served him well when he was hardly a good student, and Mom and Dad wanted him to have a hobby. Rita told them Mr. Perlman was coming to play and they decided to take Jay. After a rousing night of pleasing and attractive music, someone told Mr. Perlman that a boy in a wheelchair had come to hear him. Itzak Perlman is paralyzed as well, having contracted polio at age four, and maybe he felt a connection to Jay, so he told them to invite him and my parents backstage. Once there, he started a cordial conversation with Jay, who was probably ten at the time, asking him questions about his violin playing.

"So Jay, do you like to practice?"

"No. Do you?"

"Yes, I do." He replied, "I practice about six hours each day."

"Man, if I didn't have it by now, I'd give it up." Jay finished.

Holding his tongue was never Jay's strength, but his honesty provided soul food to us. It was nice to know that when you asked his opinion, you were going to get it. He never held his tongue on the telephone either, and Mom and Dad had to start putting limits on him since he would call people all day if they didn't stop him. If you called our house, Jay usually answered. He talked to my friends for minutes on end before I even knew they had called for me. Once someone called on a quiet Sunday afternoon and Jay started talking to the caller. Thirty minutes later Dad saw that Jay had been on the phone

for quite sometime and he asked him who it was. "Oh, its for you Dad," but Jay kept on talking.

When we moved into our house at Whitmar, Dad had put in an elevator so Jay would be able to go upstairs. When they told him he wasn't allowed to talk on the phone, he would get in the elevator, go about halfway up, push the stop button, and then talk on the emergency phone in the elevator to Kenny Groshart or Andrew Hendricks, until Mom or someone would finally realize he was missing and find him in there hiding on the phone.

Jay talked just to talk sometimes. He pestered Dad a lot, always wondering,

"Hey Dad, can I ask you a question?"

"Yes Jay."

"Um. What are we having for dinner?"

"Hey Dad, can I ask you a question.... um.... what time does the game come on?" This would go on for question after question and finally Dad realized he was just talking for the sake of it and told him,

"Jay you can ask me anything you want, just don't ask me again if you can ask me a question." A few moments later Jay said,

"Hey Dad, can I...nevermind."

Talking showed us that Jay cared, it was the way he involved himself in his community of friends and family. He called people by their first name no matter their age or importance. He asked them questions about their family, their job, their baseball game, and their hobbies and interests. There was never a sense of Jay wanting to tell everyone about his troubles, but he wanted to know the troubles of others. Talking was also a way

of knowing that we loved him. I know that me telling him about school or my latest love interest in high school or simply about the afternoons happenings at soccer practice gave him a place of importance in my life, a life he really cared about. Rebecca Ozier, a cousin, next-door neighbor, and an 'adopted' sister in our family, said that Jay made her feel important, made her know that someone really cared about what was going on in her life, and it didn't matter that it was a little boy in a wheelchair. It was a lack of self-consciousness that Jay carried around like a big stick and it hit people hard because they couldn't believe how selfless and others-centred this kid was.

After Jay died, we talked about him and still do. We tell our favorite Jay stories and talk about missing him. We don't hold it in, because Jay never held it in. At his funeral, people talked for hours, sharing episodes and anecdotes of conversations over the phone, at ball games, in the halls at church or at school. They told of his static voice and high tone, his pulling of jackets and pant legs to get attention, his belly laugh, and knotted teeth and rising smile, and all the other little things that drew people to join him in his cocktail hours.

7. Cedarwood

Every door frame in that house had gashes an inch deep and an inch wide at shin level where Jay had slammed into them over and over while driving his electric wheelchair. All the doors had ramps into them. Pennies hid under stacks of paper, couch cushions, and behind every nook and cranny. That old oak tree in the front yard had been climbed hundreds of times and the yard had been our baseball field, our battlefield, and our go-kart track. This place was Cedarwood, and it was our home for over ten years.

We moved there soon after Sam was born, six months or so. Grandmargie and Grandchubby lived down the block, the streets were relatively traffic free, and there was plenty for us chlidren to participate in. I guess it is no more special than everyone else's house that they grew up in, but it is special for that reason alone, that we grew up there, made our childhood there, and that makes it special enough. There was not that much work that had to be done immediately, since Jay was just in his first wheelchair a few months after we got there. But it didn't take long for him to find other means to get around.

Sam, Jay, and I shared a room for years, probably until I was twelve or thirteen, and we moved in when I was five. At first it was just Jay and me since Sam was an infant

and got to sleep in Mom and Dad's room with them. They had a changing table in our room, because we never had to stop changing Jay's dirty poops. There was a cherry red steel bunk bed that we shared and we slept together in the bottom bunk. Jay learned early how to throw himself the foot or so to the ground whenever he pleased and crawl all over the house. Sometimes it was in the middle of the night and he would crawl into Mom and Dad's room and get them to pick him up and put him in the bed with them to sleep. If he woke up first or woke up last he flung himself out of bed and crawled down the skinny hall covered in family photographs towards the big den that had a vaulted ceiling and an upstairs balcony to watch TV or find us in the kitchen.

Jay's knees sometimes would get rashes from crawling so much and Mom and Dad told him not crawl to their room at night anymore. One night he was already nearing their door that was only a few feet from ours and then he remembered their warning. We found him asleep face down on the carpet in the hall the next morning.

Our room had dark blue trimmed walls with some type of wall paper that I cannot remember, a huge double wide window with a bench seat on it, two little closets, the red bunk, and a homemade tall bed with storage underneath it. For years, that was Jay's bed and it sat at the perfect height for Mom to change him and take care of him without having to bend over. We slept on the floor all the time in sleeping bags in makeshift tents made of bedsheets, using flashlights instead of lamps.

Clare's room was right next to ours, across the hall from Mom and Dad's room, and she was in our room all the time. It was more fun than Christmas living in there together. The den was our domain though, sitting for hours on the big chair, all three of us crammed on it, and Jay in his wheelchair next to us only inches from the TV screen.

Saved by the Bell, *Family Matters*, and *Full House* came through that TV nearly every afternoon, ESPN in the morning, with *CHiPs* and the *Price is Right* during the summer time. Mom tried to get us to turn it off and go do our homework, but we usually finagled our way into watching at least a show or two. If we got into trouble, it was sometimes a month without TV as punishment, but Dad got soft after a week or two and we could turn it back on. Really though, we watched it very little considering it was only an hour or so a day, the rest of it was spent playing soccer, baseball, riding bikes, and taking Karate lessons or guitar lessons or violin lessons, or cleaning up the garage before Dad got home.

Jay was the most cautious of us kids and was wary of pranks or tricks. Two memories stick out in my mind to illustrate this part of his personality. I had a friend Matt over to spend the night and the next morning it was just Matt, Jay, Jay's friend Rod, and me. I was supposedly the responsible babysitter, but instead Matt and I got all the cushions and pillows in the house and piled them high in the middle of the den, then jumped over and over again from the upstairs banister into the mound we had made. Jay was telling me over and over how stupid I was for doing something so dumb.

"Mom is going to kill you when she gets home…."

"This is so stupid Drew, you are going to kill yourself."

"I cannot believe you are going to do this. Dad is going to beat your butt when he hears about this."

Of course that didn't stop us from jumping, but he sure had the telephone in hand ready to call 911 if something had happened. The other time my cousin Caleb was over and we were playing outside. I guess Caleb and I were about thirteen, so Jay was ten, and

we had the bright idea of showing them that if you held a match up and sprayed WD-40 on it, it made a huge torch. Jay vehemently discouraged us from this activity, and actually tattled on us. The next day we went fly-fishing and Dad made Caleb and me stand in the frigid water without waders because of our mischievousness.

Jay could get mad as hops and yell just like the rest of us. He hated getting up in the morning, and I remember nearly every morning as Clare and I got ready for school, Mom would have a terrible time getting Jay to eat breakfast or cooperate with her as she got him ready for school. He didn't like having to ride the bus for handicapped kids that picked him up in the early morning. He screamed when it was time for him to practice his violin lessons. Rolling himself into a corner and locking his wheelchair brakes, he would pout and whine for twenty minutes until he realized he had to practice sooner or later. Taking a bath was the greatest of evils, probably because he feared getting his ears wet so much. He would cry and cry when it was bath time, and occasionally try to hide from Mom or lock himself in the bathroom.

Just as he acted a child like Clare, Sam, and I, he also got the punishment as well. My parents were proponents of spanking, and I am so thankful they did instead of grounding me and making me bitter. A spanking was quick and it got the point across. There is not one time I remember those days at Cedarwood having received a spanking from a parent in anger, without having them hold me afterwards and tell me they loved me, and I usually didn't doubt them. Jay couldn't get the same spankings, but they would pop him on the hand. Dad was creative with his punishments and they make me laugh now. He was a dentist then and I was the laziest tooth brusher that went through childhood. He checked my teeth, found them disgusting, picked off the grime, put it on a

saltine cracker, and made me eat it. Needless to say I became much careful about brushing my teeth. He also made Sam and I do pushups whenever we sassed Mom. Jay never would stop sucking his thumb, so Dad started putting vinegar on it, but I guess Jay just got used to that taste too.

There were a lot of other people over there at our house to help take care of us. Mary Francis was there all the time, once a week or so and whenever Mom and Dad went out of town. Mrs. Jo Ann Smart was there too, an older black lady with husky arms and a dark black mustache, who could whip us and love us all in the same breath. She could handle Jay's temperaments better than anyone. "Jay Boy, you are going to eat if tell you to eat," she might have said. They changed Jay, gave him shots, fed him, helped him with homework, and put him to sleep many times.

Lisa Pounds, a college girl who needed a place to live while she was at the University of Memphis, moved in with us. There was a bedroom with its own bathroom upstairs that was just an old office to us, but she moved in and helped take care of us. The first time she had to give Jay a shot in his leg, which he couldn't feel of course, he decided to play a dirty trick on her and he screamed out like he was in serious pain when he watched the needle go in. After that she would never give him a shot and she made me do it cause Jay had gotten her so good and it shook her up. She would take him to baseball games and even to class with her at the University of Memphis. She started dating Kevin Johnston, one of Dad's business partners, and they took us out sometimes, even down to the river to see the Memphis Sunset Symphony. Kevin liked to shoot hoops with Jay. One night when he was over, we were all outside playing basketball but then went in to start making chips and rotel cheese dip, Lisa's signature dish. After a while

someone noticed that Jay was not with us. Kevin found him outside in the pouring down rain, stuck in the mud with his wheelchair.

"Hey Kev." Jay said nonchalantly.

"Jay, why didn't you yell for us to come get you?" Kevin asked him.

"Well, I figured someone would come get me eventually," and he was right.

The greatest thing about Cedarwood was by far the fact that Grandmargie, Grandchubby, and Granny were only five houses down and across the street. A little hill went down there and it seems like I went to there house almost every day for years. Whether it was to grab an egg or a carton of milk if we didn't have one, or to go and watch Grandchubby do taxidermy on his ducks and fish, or simply to talk with Granny or Grandmargie, their house was our second home. Jay went all the time and sometimes without telling anyone, just disappearing softly out the back door and driving himself in his chair down the hill to their house. Someone had to help him eventually though because they had a step or two he couldn't go up alone. Granny sat quietly in her blue sitting room next to the front door with her lighted magnifying stand for reading. As soon we rang the doorbell someone was on their way to entertain us and feed us and ask us everything about our studies or our friends or whatever they wanted. It is a privilege I took for granted many times.

They picked us up from school, drove us to church and games, babysat us, had us to spend the night, taught us the Bible and the old hymns and stories of the glorious missionaries who had forsaken all the world had to offer in order to serve and love others in the name of Jesus. We soaked it in and learned more than we can explain. Grandmargie bathed Jay and loved him like he was her own, and he was, because I know

there was a time when Mom was Grandmargie's baby. She helped him with his homework and counted his thousands of pennies with him, read to him, and rocked him softly when he was younger. Jay called Grandchubby all the time to see "what you are doing this Saturday?" hoping he would get the invite to go down near Tunica, Mississippi to go to Beaver Dam Lake for a fine day of fishing. Grandchubby took him a bunch, caught fish and let him reel them in. I remember Grandchubby's old yellow GMC Jimmy that smelled like dirty dog and leaked like a rotten roof. He told us we were full of blue mud, and we told him he was full of fish fins and bird feathers. To have some gems so close to us there at that house made it home enough for any young boy or girl.

When we moved out of Cedarwood, we left a lot behind. The gashes on the doors and cabinets remained, as well as the old oak tree in the front yard where we played ball and learned how to cut grass. It was a special place, the place where we grew up.

Like Father, Like Son

Many people have mentioned how much Jay and My Dad were alike in personality. This chapter will go reflect the special father son relationship between them, their similarities, and the special stories and times they had together.

8. First Evan, John Martinez, and the Love of God's People

As soon as Jay was born, and even before, our family was part of something bigger, and that was our community. I don't really mean our neighborhood or even just our church or school. It was wider than that. Our community was my parent's old college and high school friends, and Clare and my Sunday school teachers, just to name a few. Both of my parents grew up in Memphis, as did my grandparents, so there were so many people who knew us and cared for us. When Jay was born, there were many people who identified in some way with Mom or Dad and they immediately took some ownership of Jay.

As I talked with people about Jay's life, one of the most obvious streams of thought that they shared with me was how Jay was shared. Yes, our immediate family carried most of the weight of the responsibility, but so many others pitched in throughout his life. Some of our pastors learned to catheterize him so Mom would not have to drive out to the school numerous times a day. Friends and family helped tutor and home school him. When he was sick, they came to the hospital bearing gifts. People carried him on field trips and talked to him on the phone for countless hours.

Jay loved people more than anything else. I bet it has something to do with the fact that at a young age he was surrounded by others, who watched him grow up and

aided the process. He took part in all the growing up processes of our church, our home, and school. He learned to pursue people in ways that surprised them. Everyone says he "never met a stranger" and it was so true.

The church we grew up in, First Evangelical Church of Memphis, is a decently large suburban church with a big heart for preaching the Bible, sending missionaries, and having great community fellowship amongst its congregation. When Jay was young, he started going to the nursery like everyone else. Mr. Wells, a family friend, had Jay in the one and half year olds nursery class. Jay stood out to him because of Jay's back brace which let him sit straight, and because Jay had a special spirit about him. He didn't cry with the rest of the kids, instead he sat with wide eyes and watched his peers get changed and wait for their mommas, happy just to be there with new people.

Nothing really changed with that either. First Evan was a place where Jay could roll around in his wheelchair uninhibited and speak to whomever crossed his path. He made friends easily. Ben Stott was one of those friends who grew up with Jay, wheeled him around, and talked about the cute girls in Sunday school. Jay never did believe in "kudies," he always liked girls. "Jay was the most outgoing person I ever met," Ben told me. Ben was not the only one with such sentiments. Jay was a fixture at First Evan. When you walk in the main door on the side of the church there is a big wide hall that we call the fellowship hall. Jay was usually there or somewhere nearby.

One Sunday, when he was third or fourth grader, he pulled aside Jamie Hill. Jamie was probably in his mid-thirties, a fun loving guy who is always kidding around, but with a little cushion on the front side. Jay pulled him aside and whispered with his mouth covered from one side as he leaned sideways out of the wheelchair,

"Jamie, I have two words for you.... LOSE WEIGHT!" Jamie cracked up at this little boy's unashamed commentary. Jay said to him,

"Wait, I have two more...Jenny Craig!"

In December of '94, Jay had a series of surgeries on the shunt on his head. After a few weeks at the hospital he was home again, and that Christmas Eve we went to an evening service, a yearly event for the family. Our pastor, Ronnie Stevens, asked Jay to come up on stage and say a few words to the congregation. Dad and I picked up his chair and set him next to the pulpit. Ronnie started to ask Jay some questions.

"Did they shave your head for the surgery Jay?" He asked.

Jay pulled off the bandage that looked like a yamaka and showed the wound to the crowd,

"Yep, they had to shave it all off," he answered.

Jay kept staring at the microphone and in the middle of one of his answers he went ahead and grabbed the microphone out of Ronnie's hand and began to monologue. Not many people could steal the attention from our Pastor, but Jay did. He started telling stories in that squeaky and animated voice. He told them about the surgery, the nurses, and the time in the hospital. He said he was just glad to be alive. Dad started getting a little embarrassed and gave Jay the cut sign. Jay looked at him, looked at Ronnie, looked at the congregation, and said, "Well, I'm done." Ronnie looked confused and Jay said,

"My Dad gave me the cut sign." Ronnie proclaimed as we took Jay back down the stairs that that was one of the most impressive acts of child obedience he had ever seen. The congregation loved it.

Jay knew most everyone at church, from the older widows to the three year olds and everyone in between. He was friends with Dewey, our charismatic maintenance man and called our senior pastor by his first name. One of his longest lasting and closest friendships at church was with a peer, John Mark Braswell. John Mark remembers wheeling Jay around and finding those quiet places in the basement and choir loft by the elevator where kids weren't supposed to go. Every week they had a ritual. Ride the elevator up to the choir room, sneak around, ride to the basement, take a few laps around the hall, then go back to the ground level. It was those traditions that made Jay smile, knowing he was going to get to spend that time every week with someone special to him.

Jay's relationship with John Mark is reflective of his relationship with a lot of his friends. John Mark became the star quarterback for my high school, and he was a great athlete as a kid too. Jay even went to his games to watch and encourage him. Jay did not let that intimidate him. Jay was no respecter of persons. Young or old, black or white, cool or nerdy, girl or boy, it made no difference.

At youth group Jay always introduced himself to the new kids, asking them where they were from and maybe telling an off-color joke or a wild story to make them feel welcome. He reached out to people regardless of their stature because it was an opportunity to love. I know he never thought about it like that, he only did what he liked and that was talking to people and sharing himself with them.

John Martinez met Jay for the first time at one my boy scout troop's pancake breakfasts. We had the breakfasts all the time to raise money for summer camp and my family always attended, Jay included. John was our junior high youth pastor, a big guy

with dark hair and a broad smile. My first vivid memories of him were on a mission's trip to West Virginia where we did construction together while he was the youth intern. He was the leader that snuck off with the older boys to light farts and stay up late and avoid trouble.

John was sitting at a table and Jay rolled up to eat with him. An hour later they were still there and Jay was gabbing on. A friendship had been struck and it was one that would last until the end of Jay's life. They watched movies together, served in the inner city together, talked on the phone almost daily, spent the night over, told stories together, and so much else.

John and Jay's relationship is important because it is also a story about Jay and the youth group at First Evan, which in many ways, besides our house, was were Jay was most at home. He knew the kids, he knew the leaders, he knew the songs, and he relished every minute of it. Every Wednesday they had a weekly meeting with games, singing, food, and Bible teaching. Jay called John every Wednesday.

"What is the plan for tonight, John?" he would ask.

"Well Jay, I am speaking on dating (or whatever the topic for the week was) and we are going to sing and get people to sign up for the retreat."

"Alright, I just wanted to know."

The conversation most assuredly lasted longer and included a story or tidbit. Jay wanted to be right there in the action, knowing what to expect, how he could help, what time to be there, because it was the time of the week where he got to see all his friends too. Those years Jay was home schooling, for a number of reasons, and he sometimes did not get to see his friends as often as he would have liked. He got so pumped up about

seeing Kenny, Andrew, John Mark, Ben, and so many others. He loved the girls there too. He would say to one of the fellas,

"She is a pretty hot chick, don't you think?" Never a dull word.

Martinez and Jamie Hill were good buddies and they took Jay for a special outing one day. There is a steakhouse in Memphis called Buckley's where Dad loved to take us. He knows the owner and their food is delicious. When Jay found out they had opened a new Buckley's downtown, he wanted to go, and Jamie and John promised to take him. One fine early afternoon, they pulled up to our house in a 1975 Orange Buick Cutlass Convertible, and they were wearing sunglasses. The look on Jay's face was worth a million dollars. "Awesome!" he exclaimed with eyes closed and fist tightened. John picked Jay out of the wheelchair by his underarms, put him in the front seat with his sunglasses and Jamie threw the chair in the back seat. They drove down Poplar Ave. with the top down and sun shining. Jay thought he was king. When they got to Buckley's and got seated, Jay ordered the ten-dollar stuffed mushroom appetizer and a fifteen-dollar filet mignon. He ate what he wanted and he chewed as slow as a cow. They were real heroes to him that day and he never forgot it.

Whenever Jay was at the hospital, John and the senior high youth pastor, Darrin Hillis, would come dressed up as crazy army doctors to entertain Jay and other people that were there too. The waiting room for parents can be a dull and dreary place, so they were usually welcomed with open arms by the families and nurses too. Darrin is real enthusiastic and they would walk in wearing army hats, Charlie Chaplin mustaches, and doctor robes, pretending to be doing work on patients. I was there sometimes when they came and Jay loved it even though he was doped up on medication. Both of those guys

would do anything for Jay. Darrin and another pastor, Brett Hilliard, learned to catheterize Jay so Mom would have a break in the day to get other things done.

If Jay was healthy, he was present at every church function possible. The youth group was going down to the Neighborhood Christian Center, a local Christian charity, to package food boxes for the hungry. It was the middle of Winter and they had to pack 10,000 boxes in a giant warehouse without heating. Jay wanted to go and Mom bundled him up tight so he wouldn't get too chilled. The kids stood in an assembly line and Jay put himself next to a palate of canned corn. Anyone there could have done a faster or better job handing corn to the next person, but he sat there, consistently and quietly grabbing one can at a time and handing it to the next person. He was serious and worked diligently as if there was something of great significance in his labors. He got cold and could have quit, but instead he came back and continued, just sitting there patiently grabbing one can at a time.

A lot of those boys he spent time with were in his small group, which got together weekly or so to discuss the Bible or issues about life and to get to know each other better. A lot of the time they ended up talking football or planning a weekend slumber party at our house. Jay loved those guys with all the strength his heart could muster, calling them almost every week and organizing the time and meeting place. One thing that made him sad was when he thought his friends did not care about spiritual things, or did not pay respect to the teacher.

He couldn't sing well because of his vocal cords being partially paralyzed. But he sang anyways, and got angry when his friends were too cool to sing. John said he always sat on the right side facing the speaker, at the end of the aisle, right next to the overhead

machine. With his head back on the chair, eyes closed, and sometimes his hands raised or at least his hands opened, that boy would sing and sing loud, if not in breath, he sang loud in spirit, no matter what the other kids were doing.

One Friday night John was taking those small group boys to the movie rental store and they were debating which movie to get. The boys decided on ***Dr. Doolittle*** with Eddie Murphy, but John was a little hesitant due to the PG-13 rating and did not want to have to answer to any parents. He told Jay his dilemma and Jay responded with,

"That's a load of crap Martinez. We are getting this movie." Needless to say Jay talked him into it and they ended up renting the movie.

A week before Jay died, he had worked hard to have those guys over to our house to celebrate the news of hearing that he was going to be able to return to ECS for his 8th grade year, after three years of home schooling. Most, if not all of those small group guys went to ECS and were excited about having him back. Noah Wells was there, Sam Rodgers, the Holland twins, Kenny Groshart, Andrew Hendricks, John Mark Braswell, and about five or six others. The only night they could do it we had another guest staying at our house, so John was nervous not to wake him up. They went and saw the new Star Wars movie, and had to stop at K-mart on the way home to get something for my mom. Jay had fallen asleep in the car and starting snoring like Grandchubby. Once they got to K-mart around midnight, a couple of the boys took off and got on the bikes in the sporting goods section and starting riding laps around the store. John couldn't stop them, and neither could the three or four people working there. They eventually left and Jay was laughing but mad too since his buddies were acting immature. They got home, stayed up talking and playing Nintendo.

Jay spent the last day of his life at First Evan, working at Vacation Bible School, a summer program for kids in pre-school and elementary school. They made crafts, sang, played games, and learned Bible stories. He was with the Kindergarten age children and he led them in a single file line to the main assembly of the day. Jay was a volunteer leader for the week and had not really wanted to go that morning. But him being there was a fitting picture of how he loved that place and the people there. He also went up to visit John while he was there, went to his office, asked him about the plans for the week. Jay had noticed a boy in the youth group who did not seem to feel welcome or have any friends. Jay was scheming with John how they could include him. It was all Jay's idea, wanting everyone to feel as welcome as he did, and it was the last conversation they would have.

When Jay called up to the church all those times over all those years, either to talk to John or Darrin or Brett or whoever was there, he always had to talk to Elizabeth first. Elizabeth is the church secretary who answers the phone very cordially and always helps you get connected to whoever you are calling. Usually it was John, and every day she let his calls through, even if John was really busy. The morning Jay died, Mom called Elizabeth to get John to come over to our house. Usually that early morning call was Jay wanting to talk. John was on his way to his car in the church parking lot when Elizabeth called him on his cell.

"John, Jay has gone home." That is all she said but he knew immediately. Jay would not be calling anymore. The youth group would no longer have the kid who cared so much about the new kids and the singing and the speakers. John had lost a true

companion and his heart was broken. Through tears he drove to our house to join the already gathered throng of mourners.

At the funeral, the community that cared so much about Jay gathered there at First Evan, Jay's second home, to wish him farewell. The funeral is really another story, but the reality of the loss of Jay to that church hit real and hit hard. Pastors talked about his service to the church. Elders spoke on his spirit of joy in spite of pain. John talked about Jay not being able to sing and that Jay singing in heaven gave him great comfort and excitement. It was a brave and sweet goodbye to a boy who had given himself away to a people he called his own.

In the elevator in our house where Jay used to hide and talk on the phone and talk to his friends on his favorite toy, there hangs a picture. That picture has all the kids from the youth group, with John and the other leaders, and Jay is smiling from ear to ear. These were his friends and that was his place. We keep the picture there as a reminder of how important it was to him, and how so many people surrounded him and received love and hope and humor and faith and confidence and optimism because of him. He was never ashamed of his Savior, never ashamed of his friends, never ashamed of his condition, and never ashamed of the life he had been given.

On the Road

Our family took numerous vacations every year of Jay's life, which obviously yields many stories, anecdotes, and memories that will be recorded here.

Sissy

This chapter will be about Clare, Jay's and my sister, and the relationship they had, including many of her thoughts and recollections about him.

9. "33"

Our Family and the Sextons had a long-standing family relationship. I guess it started sometime when I was a kid and Dad was practicing Dentistry with Dr. Jim Sexton, the father, who has a big round face with an aristocratic southern accent, a happy face and a temper that can get your attention. He and his wife Pat, had three sons, Jimmy, Scott, and Barrett, and we met them when they were all in college or just out of high school. They had given us that yellow rectangular trampoline when they were too big to jump on it anymore.

Both families loved the University of Tennessee Volunteers football team, and Jimmy and Scott were both managers for the football team when they were students at Tennessee. Jimmy got into the sports management business after he graduated and started doing very well. This was about the same time that Dad began to work a little in the insurance and investment business as a side job from dentistry. One of Jimmy's clients was Reggie White, the 'minister of defense' as they called him in the NFL, the great defensive lineman who was an All-American at Tennessee. While we still living in the rental house on Waynoka, Jimmy brought Reggie over to see us before he and Dad took him to dinner. I have pictures of me in my pajamas wearing a kids Tennessee Football

helmet, holding a little football, sitting on Reggie's massive knee and dwarfed by a monstrous hand, and he was smiling.

Jay was too little to remember that day, but Jimmy would continue to bring over some of his athletes for years. Dad did some business for a few of his clients, and Jimmy had a lot of personal respect and admiration for my Dad as a friend and somewhat of a mentor too, and would get us tickets to ball games or autographed basketballs and other creative things.

A special relationship was forged between Jay and one of Jimmy's newest clients, a tall skinny graduate of Central Arkansas University, named Scottie Pippen. Jimmy signed Scottie in the late spring of 1987. Jay was not even two yet. He brought Scottie over for dinner at our house soon thereafter, and Jay was old enough to say a few words and remember the occasion when he was older. Little did Scottie know that this little kid would become perhaps his biggest fan and they would meet numerous times throughout his career as a star basketball player.

Once Jay was old enough to know and understand, he watched the Chicago Bulls religiously, and told everyone about his friend, Scottie Pippen.

"Man, did you watch Scottie play last night?" he might have asked, "he had a great game, and that slam dunk was sweeeeet!"

We were all huge Chicago Bulls fans, and I am not a fan of too many professional sports teams, but it made sense because we knew Scottie, and we had the teams autographs and hats and banners and everything.

I had more exposure to them at first than Jay did. When the Bulls were in their first NBA finals back in 1991 against the Lakers, Jimmy got Dad some tickets and we

drove up to Chicago in our conversion van to go see game two of the match-up. I was only nine, but I remember every bit of it. Richard Sr., little Richard, Kevin, Dad and I piled into the van early in the morning and we drove straight to Chicago for the evening game. We ate at Michael Jordan's restaurant, I ate a steak, and drank seven or so cokes while we were at the table. A few minutes later we were stuck in traffic and I had to pee. They told me to pee in a biggie Wendy's cup sitting on the console, and I told them it wasn't going to be big enough. They laughed and told me there was no way I could fill it up. So I started peeing in the large cup, Dad holding me steady, Kevin holding the cup, and maybe Richard was driving. After a whole minute passed by, they saw that the cup was nearly full. I said,

"I can't stop."

"Drew, seriously don't pee everywhere, you have to stop," someone probably hollered.

"Man, I have never seen anyone pee like that, where did that come from?" Kevin or little Richard asked. While they were jabbering, I was still peeing and it stopped millimeters away from the top, we pulled over and dumped it in the grass.

The game was one of the all time greats. We were in the old Chicago stadium, and this was the first NBA Finals of the six that Michael Jordan and Scottie would lead the Bulls to before the dynasty ended. Magic Johnson, in his last years, was playing for the Lakers, and the old guard was defending against the new guard, and the Bulls came out big. The Bulls scored over a hundred points and the Lakers didn't break ninety. Jordan made that famous move where he went up one way on the goal and then took the ball the other way for a huge dunk, with his bald-head shining and his tongue out. I remember

they had performers during the timeouts and there was nice young black lady sitting next to me, giving me candy and popcorn and privying me to her commentary on the state of the game. It was wonderful and we drove home straight through the night.

Jay's time would come later, and only after remaining loyal during high times and low ones. He called Jimmy after many losses to ask him what the problem was during the game. Everyone else seemed to want to talk about Michael Jordan, but Jay only cared about his man Scottie. The Bulls played an exhibition game in Memphis a few different times. Jimmy scored front row tickets for us every time they came. It was Sam, Dad, me, David Collins, Richard, Jr. and Sr., and Kevin too. Scottie would give Jay the high sign or stop by and say hello after the game or during some type of break.

One time everyone in the family except me was eating lunch at the Southwind Country Club and Scottie was there. He had to duck his head through the doors just to get through. Sam or Jay saw him and he came over and talked for a while, and that gave Jay a conversation piece for weeks.

Dad did something special with sports for all the boys. My trip was to that Lakers Game. Sam got to go to see the Green Bay Packers play the New England Patriots in the Super Bowl, down in New Orleans. But I think Jay was the most pleased with his trip.

Mom and Dad drove up to Chicago with him to see the Bulls play. They stayed downtown, went out to eat, and then Dad and Jay went to a game. It was the playoffs and they had really close seats. During the game, one of the event staffers came and told Dad that Scottie wanted them to go down near the locker room after the game to say hello. This was a surprise to both Jay and Dad, and they were thrilled. The famous story goes that after the game when they went down the tunnel, and one of the CNNSports

commentators had stopped to interview Scottie after the game. Scottie saw Jay waiting further down the hallway, and said,

"Excuse me, I gotta go talk to my man."

They talked for about five minutes, and he introduced his wife and in-laws to my Dad and Jay. Instead of patronizing them, he insisted on thanking them profusely for coming to see him play, a very humble and noble admonition. Jay was so excited to be a priority to his favorite athlete.

The Bulls won the finals that year, and the next year they were there again, and this time playing the Utah Jazz for the title. Jay was not doing well, in the hospital for over a month and a half for his third decompression surgery, in and out of the critical care unit. Jimmy was good at remembering Jay, not that Jay would let him forget about him, but he always was sensitive to Jay's love of sports and very encouraging in those ways. It was game six of that series, and Jimmy was up in Chicago for the game, on a Friday night.

The Bulls were up three games to Utah's two, and they won that sixth game to take home another championship. When the game was over, Scottie, who had heard from Jimmy that Jay was not doing well, took off his game shoes, a whopping size 17, signed them... "To Jay!" and gave them to Jimmy to take to Jay in the hospital. The next afternoon Jimmy went over to the hospital, found Jay, who was excited for the Bulls, but not feeling well, and gave him the shoes. Those shoes were his prized possession.

The next season, Scottie, Michael, and a host of others, moved on from the Bulls and the dynasty ended. Jay had taken a piece of ownership in Scottie's career, and the golden years of the Scottie as Jordan's trusted and needed wing man were over. Jay

continued to watch Scottie and ask Jimmy about him, but it seemed like he was more interested in the glory days, showing off the shoes and the autographed pictures of his hero.

When Scottie heard the news about Jay's death, he wanted to do something special, and Jimmy helped him. He sent a flower arrangement and at the funeral there amongst a sea of other flower arrangements, stood his number, 33, in bright Chicago Bulls Red. I know Jay would have loved it, for the world to know that his stories about this bigger-than-life athlete were true, that he really was Scottie's friend, and that Scottie was going to miss him like everyone else.

It would have been easier for Scottie to have been nice to Jay once, or simply signed a single autograph or taken a simple picture. Instead, he let this little boy's undying spirit and unending interest in his life drive him to compassion. My high school English and History teacher, Coach Collums, tells me that when he thinks of Jay, he sees a picture in his mind of Jay in his wheelchair, and Scottie kneeling next to him; a giant, larger than life superstar, and a simple, humble, funny, and energetic handicapped kid. The world's wisdom tells us that one is worthy to be praised and the other is to be pitied, that the one has much to offer and the other one will only take and drain. Yet, this picture of Jay with Scottie, both smiling, says that this world's wisdom is simple foolishness.

10. Playing with the Fellas

The Braves were playing in the National League Championship series and it was a close game. I don't remember who they were playing, and it really doesn't matter, it only mattered that it was the Braves. All the cousins our age were over. Frank and Caleb had come from Jackson for the weekend, and Stephen and Walter were there too. We had all started watching the game after dinner in the little living room off of the entrance hall, the room with the old rounded off TV with turntable knobs, probably my parents' first TV when they got married. After a few innings most of us got bored and turned on a John Wayne western in the den . A while later we heard Walter and Jay doing the Braves Indian chant and we walked in and there they were, Walter standing and Jay rolled up close, only a couple feet from the screen waving their arms like the rest of the crowd there in Atlanta, cheering on their Braves.

Our cousins were over all the time, as were many of Jay's buddies. From the time he was six or seven until he died, his fellas were over at the house nearly every day of the week, and every day in the summer it seemed. If they weren't over, Jay was on the phone asking them why they weren't and scheduling the next appointment. They all remember similar activities when they were with Jay.

Kenny told me about watching ***Father of the Bride*** and ***The Parent Trap*** about once a week. They would sit there, Kenny on the big chair that had its back to the TV, and Jay planted inches away from the screen with his thumb always in his mouth. He laughed at the same parts every time. Earlier in life it had been ***Cool Runnings***, the movie about the Jamaican bobsled team. Stephen, Walter, Sam, and I had the entire movie memorized, and I mean the entire movie. We would quote it throughout the whole thing and Jay got mad and told us to shut up so he could hear the movie.

There were three other boy cousins within a year of me. Caleb was the oldest with a fiery spirit to match his short stature, then me, then Stephen, the dark headed strong one, and Frank, the tender big bear of the four. The fearsome foursome we called ourselves. Walter, Jay, Sam, John Lyle, William, and Ben were along most of the time too, but since they were younger they had to be excluded from our 'club'. We went hunting together over the Winter break, and Jay came along a few times. He went on a goose chase in Arkansas with us and patiently watched from the truck as we carried our twelve gauge shotguns through the ditches and rice fields. There was a dove hunt around Labor Day one summer, and I have a great picture of Jay, Stephen, Caleb, Sam, and I staring with our heads back and lips up with our days work on the ground in front of us. Jay had a hard face on too, wearing his camouflage, arms crossed, just one of the boys.

We spent the summers waterskiing and tubing, and although Jay didn't care too much, hee would watch and encourage as usual. Stephen says that he always remembers Jay getting a big kick out of sneaking up behind him and pinching him on the butt, laughing and then doing it again minutes later. Everyone played Ken Griffey Baseball on the Nintendo and Tecmo Super Bowl, and we would argue and yell at each other and

fight some too. Jay didn't like the fighting much, especially if I was picking on Sam, and he would let me know it too.

He mingled well with the older boys, my friends. David Collins was over a lot during those years on Cedarwood. David and I were good buddies, riding our bikes to his house or mine, taking turns I guess. He had an Iguana and boxing gloves and those things were cool, so I liked going over there. But we had a trampoline and a fort, so he probably liked coming to our house. We fought a lot though, cause I was jealous that he was a good athlete, and he was jealous that I was a good student. We'd fight, then get over it and play roller hockey the next day. David says he always remembers Jay calling out "all-time goalie" when we put on our rollerblades and played hockey on the asphalt.

Richard was the third party of my boyhood. Richard, David, and I took Tae Kwon Doe lessons together for ages, piling into Mrs. Debbie or Mrs. Barbara or Mom's car, driving all the way to Bartlett, another Memphis suburb, to Mr. Kim's Academy, learning to defend ourselves and get all that boyhood energy out of our systems. Jay would come and cheer us on, especially when we traveled to Chattanooga every year for the state tournament. I always lost the fighting competitions, but almost everyone went home with a medal. Richard always won the gold, but he was good at whatever he played or learned or touched. In many ways, my boyhood was Jay's boyhood, because he came to my games, my tournaments, played roller hockey and Nintendo with all my friends, and watched Abbot and Costello and John Wayne. He was old enough to hang out with us, which he did often and well. When I got older he still knew all my friends. David told me he remembers Jay screaming, "Dave! Dave! Hey Man, Great run!" when David was the all-star tailback for our high school team. My fellas were Jay's fellas, and at his funeral

four or five of them got up to tell stories of their friendship with him and admiration of his life.

But Jay sure had his own friends too and didn't ever need help in finding them. Kenny, Andrew, John Mark, Noah, Rod, Walter, Scott Durett, Robert Walker and many others spent more time in our house than I did sometimes during high school.
Jay was creative with his ideas about how to spend the time. Even though he couldn't hit golf balls, he wanted Walter to take him to the driving range to watch him practice and maybe goof off too. When most of those boys were at ECS in sixth grade, while Jay was homeschooling, Coach Roelofs, our PE coach, said that everyday when they took prayer requests, his buddies would always mention his name, especially Andrew, his faithful companion.

He reached out to Sam's friends too, and made them feel older and welcome. He arm wrestled with Will Tashie, told Russell Garner he needed less caffeine, rode in the elevator with Patrick Young, and spent endless afternoons with the Klinke boys across the street on Whitmar. He watched them play sports and he hung out with them playing Nintendo or the computer games.

In many ways Jay had a regular boyhood. Only some of things we did, he could only watch but he always seemed to be content doing that, although I never know what went through his head. We played army with our toy guns outside in the backyard, especially up in the fort that Dad had someone build when we moved into that house on Cedarwood. The fort had two sections and two stories, and I had a large printed "No Girls Allowed" on the part on top. It was right by the carport and the basketball goal, so Jay could play too, and be a spy for whatever team he was on. There was a big deck on the

other side of the carport and a trampoline behind it. Jay could roll down into the yard if he wanted and go anywhere there in the yard. We jumped on the trampoline, putting Jay on there and bouncing him high. One winter day, Rod Okath was over and it had snowed hard, which in Memphis means there were two or three inches on the ground. Rod and Sam gathered the snow into a few buckets, and Jay called inside to Clare,

"Hey Clare, come out here, I have something to show you," and when she walked around the corner they smashed her with snow, and Jay loved it.

When he laughed, he closed his eyes and let his hands up and that made his body fall forward and he hit his knees with his hands, came up for more air, and then did it again. With boys over all the time, he laughed like that often. Sam, Jay, and I slept in the same room together for about five years or so, with Sam in the top bunk, me in the bottom, and Jay in a single bed built over a toy chest. Some nights, when he was younger, Jay would just sleep with me in the bottom bunk, with his head at one end and mine at the other. At about three in the morning one night, I woke up because I felt something warm on my legs and I heard Jay yelling out for Mom. Sam sometimes had trouble finding the bathroom in his sleep and he had taken a few steps off of the ladder and starting peeing on Jay's face and my legs, but Sam was sleepwalking, or sleep-peeing I guess.

Jay liked being closer to the ground so he could crawl to Mom and Dad's room, or just around his room. Dad and Mom let us sleep in a makeshift tent in the middle of the floor in our bedroom. All his buddies thought that it was awesome. We would put up a bunch of futons and cover them with sheets.

Everyone who ever came to play with Jay played with his pennies. Once when he was in the hospital, someone from church called to tell him they were coming to see him

and asked him if wanted any specific toy. He answered with, "Pennies," out of nowhere. They brought a huge metal tin of pennies and from that day on, they were his prized collection. Anytime people came to the hospital after that, they usually brought pennies. He would sit and count them, and stack them, by year or by color. He sometimes put them into rolls and took them to the bank. When he died he had accumulated nearly $600 worth of pennies. That is almost 60,000 pennies. Most of those pennies were also handled and played with by his friends. They would sit with him and count, and trade, and bet on basketball shots or game scores. In the middle of the night he asked Rod once,

"Rod, let's go count some pennies."

"Jay, we just counted some before we got in bed."

"I know, but let's count some more."

"Jay, let me go to bed."

He never got tired of those pennies.

Those boys took good care of Jay. And they came over even when they had something else to do. They played Tecmo Super Bowl on our original Nintendo, Wolfenstein on our old computer, watched old movies on American Movie Classics, slid down the stairs on the gymnastics mat, rode bikes or the go-kart, ate Combos, talked on the phone, talked about girls, or watched ESPN Sportscenter.

They took him to church, carried him up stairs, listened to his stories and commentary on everything, put up with his smelly poops and constant care. I asked them why, and they told me the reason they wanted to be around Jay was that he made them feel wanted. I thought about how powerful that was, that we all just need to feel wanted and a little boy in a wheelchair, who was not super smart, athletic, or good looking, could

do to so many of his peers, especially when many boys that just cut each other down. They tell me they did not ever see him as the different friend or the handicapped friend, he was just another one of the fellas. He could argue with them and tell them he was going to kick their butts. He got mad and cussed sometimes. He told a fair number of bull crap stories, a few dirty jokes, and a lot of borderline movie quotes. He was a boy, and one who like all the things that boys like. He watched football, and wanted to go fishing. He liked cute girls and enjoyed a good game of pool, even if he had to twist the rules so he could play. He ate steak and cheered us on when we played endless wiffleball in the front yard during those long and hot Memphis summers. When I talked to Rod about Jay, he summed it up by saying, "I can't think of one bad time we had together, not one. We always had fun together."

Labor of Love

There was a group of people who especially took care of Jay, taught him, doctored him, drove him around, among other things. They have many great memories of Jay that will bring out his personality and impact outside of our family into better view for the reader.

Mom

Jay's number one caretaker was Mom. Using her journals, and interviews, I will try to make a decent painting of what it was like to live with Jay, take care of him, and be with him nearly every day of his life. This will not be comprehensive, because she needs to write her own book, but it must be included.

11. Coach

As much as Jay loved sports, he was never far from them. We spent endless summer mornings watching ESPN baseball highlights at 9am, then at 10am, and at 11am if there was nothing else to do. Jay sat the closest to the TV, with his thumb in his wide-opened mouth, a habit he never did break. For a kid his age, it was astounding how much he really understood. He would talk to coaches and players and other friends about the Yankees game or NFL highlights and actually knew what he was talking about. An eleven-year who knew what a full court press was and the difference between man to man and zone coverage for football always seemed to surprise people.

After a particular high school basketball game at ECS, my high school, Jay was sitting in his usual place right next to the bleachers by the door to the locker room at the far corner of the gym. Joey Collums, one of the stars that year, had just missed a dunk at the end of the game. On his way to the locker room Jay pulled him aside and said,

"Joey, if you miss another dunk like that I am going to run over you with my wheelchair."

Jay was no mere spectator, simply watching the game and following Clare or me out to the car to go home. Instead he absorbed the games and the players like a sponge,

asking questions and giving answers, always having an opinion on who should start, what play to call, and a prediction about the final score.

Living as a sports fan meant giving all he had where he could. I won't ever forget Jay's presence at all my games. I was never a great star, but he treated me like I was a hall of famer. "Great game Drew!" "Nice Hit." "What happened on that play man?" I could usually hear him on the side, either waiting for me by the fence next to the dugout after an at bat in baseball, or hollering "good job" from the bleachers at one of my few football games.

Clare was a better athlete than me in high school. She even won citywide awards for her soccer skills. Our soccer field was up on a hill with the track, and that meant Jay could roll himself from the spectator bleachers and go over to the bench. Countless times while she was playing, Jay was there behind the bench, talking to the other high school kids, telling them proudly how that was her big sister out there "kicking butt."

So many people now say that they are most reminded of his absence when they are at sporting events, because he was always there, always vocal, always encouraging. I don't know what went through his head when he looked at his brothers and sister, cousins, peers, and saw healthy legs and athletic frames. Wouldn't it have been so much easier and more rational for him to hate sports, and stay away from them in order to avoid the embarrassment of knowing his own incapability?

No one remembers any of that attitude from Jay. Instead of begrudging the fact of his limitations, he embraced a new role, that of a coach, someone who could encourage and build up, and in so doing participate himself.

There were a few men in our community who continually coached the young boys in baseball. Pete Tashie, the more patient and steady leader, Robbie Jamison, the boisterous Dad who fired the boys up, and Pat Mahoney, who had a quiet nonchalant spirit about him. Pete coached me, and is still coaching, but Jay really got involved when Sam was playing for them. Sam is the most athletic child in the family, and since they were closer in age it just made more sense that Jay was more involved.

The coaches gave Jay a jersey and a hat, and let him sit on the bench when he felt like it, which was often.

"Good Job Man!" he told them in his squeaky but sure voice.

"Give me a High-five!" was probably his favorite. He loved using those parts of him that worked, and who knows how many thousands of high-fives he gave out in his life. What he really loved was seeing Sam play. They lived together, slept together, ate together, rode to school together, and by goodness they were going to play baseball together. It was as if Jay played vicariously through Sam.

Maybe it sounds too good to be real, a handicapped kid saying nothing but encouraging things to his peers as they perform on healthy legs, but it was that simple. Jay had only encouragement and advice.

"Coach, I think you oughta put Will in at pitcher, he has been throwing the ball really well the last few games." The boys and the coaches were heroes too, including him and making him feel important. One of the great moments in his life was when Coach Tashie had him roll the bases, and the boys were "trying" to tag him out. He let Mr. Tashie push him but the look on his face told the crowd and the team that he felt like he was running the last fifty meters of an Olympic dash. When he rolled over home plate he

threw his hands up, clinched his fist, shut his eyes, and bellowed a hearty, "YES!" as if the World Series had just been won.

"Coach" Jay liked baseball, but his real love was basketball. He watched the Bulls and talked about his friend Scottie and how he had met Anfernee Hardaway. He believed his cousin Walter was going to the next college star. Jay loved to ask his friends over for a game of basketball, which meant a game of Horse or watching them play with Sam and me. Jay had a friend named Rod who he really loved to play with. Rod was a tall black boy who befriended Jay when he was in the 2nd grade at ECS, and they played basketball every couple of days.

"The way he acted, you wouldn't think he was handicapped," Rod told me. They would shoot hoops and Jay could shoot too, and not too bad considering how skinny his little arms were. They would bet pennies. Jay would invite Walter over and see who was better, always betting pennies and always paying out like a true elementary school gentleman should.

Jay's opportunity to really be a part of a team came when he was in the fourth grade and wanted to try out for the Saturday League, a basketball league for all the kids at ECS where parents and cheerleaders would come and the boys would get a taste of real competition.

Coach Binkley knew Jay before that. He had known my parents for a long while, and even had the opportunity to be with Jay at school before. Dr. Binkley is one of those men in the community who pours himself out to others, and one day, as a board member at our school, he was substitute teaching and he got Jay's class. He did a math problem

and asked the class for the answer. "That's Mrs. 'so and so's' weight." Jay blurted out and burst into his usual laughter. Another question, Jay responds, "That's how old the codger is." The funny thing is, Jay loved the teacher, but at that age, kids do anything for a laugh.

Dr. Binkley remembers Jay as a boy who never felt handicapped, and perhaps that is why he unashamedly came to the Saturday League tryouts and signed himself up as a player. Dr. Binkley and Mr. Selph had already decided to coach a team, and they knew they wanted Jay on their roster, for his encouragement and the flavor he would add. Both coaches had a son playing in the league and they were the obvious first picks because their dads were coaching. Jay was the next choice.

When local news channel heard about Jay playing basketball with his peers, they ran a human-interest story about it and Jay told the reporter about making the team.

"When the phone rang, I was like… 'Here we go, here goes nothing!' and I was like… 'YES!" He said it in that squeaky voice again, his arms flaying about with the glasses falling off the bridge of his noise. His animated tone would intrigue anyone close enough to hear.

He loved that team, and was a big part of it. Every time they had to throw the ball in, Jay would do it, and sometimes he would bring it down the court in the wheelchair and throw it off to the point guard. Just like the other players, when Jay did something half-heartedly like make a bad pass, the coaches would tell him so.

"Jay, that was a terrible pass. Throw it harder, like you did earlier." It made him a player, not a spectator.

They won the championship both years. The star of the team was John Selph, a short point guard who could move like rain and shoot like Larry Bird. Jay earned the nickname 'coach' because of that team. "Hey John, sweet move buddy!" "Here we go. Here we go...Shoot it!" He never quit yelling, mostly encouragement and some occasional harassment. "What were you thinking making that pass, man," he might say. In team huddles he talked about running a man-to-man or zone defense. "What we need to here is play hard!" He told them towards the end of a game in the huddle. "Coach, should we run a 1-2-2 or a full court trap this quarter?" he asked the them.

He called coach Binkley weekly to discuss strategy and Dr. Binkley let him help. One time Jay said to him,

"Don't worry about what other teams think about me Coach. All they see is this wheelchair, but they don't see this," and he pointed to his head. He left every game as a player and even better, he left as a coach.

Jay could talk trash with the best of them. One of his favorite pastimes while he was on the team was calling our cousin Walter and playing hoops with him. When Walter would miss a shot, Jay would say that John Selph would never miss such an easy shot or that his team would school Walter's. Walter took it well, and Jay got a big kick out of it.

Mom and Dad watched those games with such pride and patience. Clare and I went to a lot of them too, but less than more, honestly. It made Jay proud to be a part of a team, something he was familiar with growing up with Clare and me and all our other cousins being athletes.

One day Mom told Coach Binkley that Jay was not doing his weight workouts for physical therapy, so he pulled Jay aside after a game.

"Jay, I think your throw-ins are getting weaker, and you are letting the team down if you don't do your part. You gotta start working out to throw it in better."

There were a lot of creative things Coach Binkley had in mind with Jay on the team. It was a way for Jay to become a part of the action, and Coach intentionally treated Jay with the equality that makes a boy grow up. It was also a way for the other boys to get to know Jay. They held a first annual "hearts and hoops" game where the girls' teams played the boys' teams. Jay ate it up and talked and kidded with all the girls there, talking trash but also talking sweet. His teammates took good care of him and paid a lot of attention to him. Those friendships they built on that team lasted long after the Saturday League years and carried into middle school.

One night Will Binkley, Jay's teammate and Dr. Binkley's son had a bunch of boys over to spend the night for his birthday and Jay was there too. The big plan was to get revenge on a girl who had rolled the Binkley's house the week before. All the boys piled into Dr. Binkley's suburban and Jay rode in the back. When they pulled up Jay got all the toilet paper and he handed it out to the boys. When a car rolled up, the other guys intentionally jumped back in the suburban and pretended to leave Jay and he yelled to them,

"Hey Guys! You forgot me! Wait, Come Back." They drove right back, picked him up and put him in the car. He told that story for a month.

It would have been so much easier for all those boys, those coaches, my parents, and anyone else involved if they had just not bothered with all the trouble it was to include Jay and put him in the middle of all the fun and excitement of sports. Some would have argued that it would not have been good for Jay to be with people like that,

because it would make him bitter or angry since he was different. But it was never like that. Jay loved sports and thrived on being around them.

I went to Dulin's Sports Academy in Memphis when I was interviewing people about Jay. Dulin's is a mega sports training facility where athletes of all ages, sizes, and sports go to get bigger, stronger, faster, smarter, and more able at their trades. It was a place where I learned how to hit a baseball properly and Sam played soccer and baseball and took training lessons for running. Jay started coming with us and he immediately met everyone who worked there. He met Tim Dulin, a retired pro baseball player who started the center and also 'Bubba'. Bubba is a soft spoken, kind-hearted man who ran the day to day business at the desk when I used to go. He took a liking to Jay and told Mom to leave him there for hours at a time once or twice a week.

Jay wheeled around, greeted people coming in the front door, and asked them a hundred questions. He rolled behind the batting cages poking fun of a bad swing or encouraging a home run. He answered the phone with, "This is Jay, can I help you?" For one whole summer it seemed like he was there every day, only ten or eleven years old. He loved all the old pro players who trained there and had nicknames for all of them. He called Bubba, 'Bubbalicious,' who said that Jay never was content just to 'sit' in his chair. If he was not at Dulin's he was calling, all the time.

One summer, 99', Jay quit calling. The boy affectionately known as 'coach' wouldn't be coming around anymore.

There is a wall there at Dulin's where autographed portraits of all the great athletes who have ever been a part of Dulin's are proudly displayed. I visited there to talk

to Bubba and looked there on that wall of stars and there was a picture of Jay, in his basketball uniform, holding a ball and smiling proudly. "Coach" Jay had made the Hall of Fame.

Whitmar

In a similar vain to the Cedarwood chapter, this one will look at the building of our house on Whitmar, which was built with Jay's care in mind. The neighbors are friends and have many stories and tidbits that are relevant.

Health History

A history of Jay's health problems, surgeries, and related times and incidents is absolutely necessary to fully tell of his life.

12. Jackson Hole, President Clinton, and the Snake River

It was a pretty crazy time for the family. We were building a new house, Jay was going to start home schooling, and I was a few weeks away from beginning high school. Clare wasn't able to go on the family vacation that summer because she was a starter for the varsity soccer team and couldn't miss practices. I was weeks away from being a freshman, and I had quit football a month or so earlier, to the disappointment of Mom and Jay. I wanted to go out west with them and if it meant not playing football then that was fine with me.

We were headed to Jackson Hole, Wyoming to fly-fish, see Yellowstone National Park, and whatever else caught our eye. The first night we got there, our hotel was hardly handicapped accessible as the brochure had advertised. It didn't matter that much though because with Dad at the back and Sam and I on either side of the front, we could carry Jay in his wheelchair anywhere he wanted.

There was a great view from the back porch. The sun was about an hour from sinking through the horizon, and there were little groundhogs or some other type of rodents scouring the little yard behind the building. Sam, Jay, and I relaxed out there as Dad took a short snooze and Mom probably reading. We had a fun night, Sam and I arguing about all sorts of things and Jay egging us on with an off color comment every

now and then. My nose kept bleeding because of the altitude, so were running a little late to go to town and get some dinner.

Jackson Hole is an enormous valley that sits under the shadow of the Grand Teton Mountains, only miles away from Yellowstone National Park. The town of Jackson is little western paradise, with a big town square complete with four matching arches made completely of elk horns. That whole day we were so amazed by the place. Hippie backpackers mingled with Harley types, all sitting there with retired upper class folk meandering around town.

We picked out a famous little burger joint right next door to the Bar with all the motorcycles outside. We sat on stools next to the counter, and Jay did too. People were coming in and out, and the charismatic cook was flipping massive burgers in piles of grease. We ate, Dad paid, and we drove on back to the other side of the Hole.

Part of the reason we chose Jackson as a destination was that Dad had a business associate who lived out there and had invited us to come visit and go fly fishing with him for a day. Mr. Esperti was a generous soul with a wide face and deep thick mustache, and he immediately made me feel welcome. The fishing trip was only for Dad and I since his boat only had room for two more. While we fished Mom took Sam and Jay to town and they shopped and toured Jackson.

The fishing was fun, and Mr Esperti taught us all sorts of new tricks. I was never very good at fly-fishing although Dad had invested a lot of time and money in it for me. Dad was a lot better than me. The most memorable part of the day came after we anchored the boat and the two of them waded a little ways upstream to fish. I was fishing near the boat, a few feet up a tributary that was flowing into the bustling Snake River.

After fishing for a few minutes, I turned and noticed that the boat was beginning to float freely downstream. I yelled up towards Mr. Esperti and Dad, but then realized there was nothing they could do since they were a few hundred yards away. I started running next to the river, but the boat started moving quicker. The Snake River is pretty fast and I running at a full sprint along the banks. When I got a little ahead of the boat I jumped in,, caught the anchor line, and swam the boat towards the shore about a half mile or so from where it had taken off.

Dad and Mr. Esperti wouldn't quit praising me for such feat, also telling me dangerous of a escapade it was and not to attempt it again. It was truly one of the finest moments an adolescent boy could have dreamed of. When we told Jay and Sam about it they started telling everyone. I was a hero that day for them and it made me stick out my chest a little further. There was nothing better than to have all the best men in your life, brothers and father, tell everyone they meet about how you saved the day.

While we had been fishing, Mom, Sam, and Jay had gone over to the Esperti's house where we were supposed to meet them to go to dinner. Mr. Esperti has done very well in the business world, as a lawyer and successful author, and his house in Jackson is a beautiful one. There is a lot of western and Indian art, with beautiful wooden paneling and furniture. When Jay rolled into the house, he looked around for a minute then blurted out to Mrs. Esperti,

"Man, Y'all must be rich!"

Mom turned as red as a summertime apple and Jay was still just admiring the house, probably waiting for an answer.

We got there a while later and found Mom and Mrs. Esperti talking on a couch and Sam and Jay were playing with some fly-fishing equipment or looking at a picture book. We talked for awhile then got ready to go to dinner. They were taking us to the Jackson Hole Country Club.

Sitting down for dinner, we told them all about the day on the river and shared my exploits as a boat rescuer. They told us what stores they visited. We asked the Esperti's about themselves. I was fascinated that Mr. Esperti had been an avid snow skier, and was presently on the National Fly-Fishing Team. Jay had more blunt comments that made us all laugh. He stared at the menu with his glasses lowered and mouth open for a long time. It was going to be a hard choice between Bison, Elk, and Caribou. Us boys could tell Dad and Mom were a little nervous about what we were going to order, but we didn't care because there are only so many times you can eat Bison and Elk at such a locality. So we did, and Jay ordered the most expensive thing on the menu, as Mr. Esperti had insisted that we order what we wanted. Jay got lots of attention asking question after question, choking on his steak and lobster a few times, and just entertaining as usual.

One of the places Mom had found in town was Jack Dennis Sporting Goods, an all-encompassing outdoor shop complete with a river guide service. Dad really wanted to get Jay and Mom out on the river to try fly-fishing. As usual he made the impossible happen. The people there at the store were very friendly but understandably apprehensive about taking a family out on the river, much less a family with a paralyzed eleven year old. Dad promised the guides a big tip, and assured them they would enjoy the trip as much as we would.

The next day we met up with our guides, whose names I cannot remember. Sam and I were in one boat, and our guide was younger, skinny guy with a big mustache, like he had been on the river since he was born. Mom and Dad were on another boat and they were going to put Jay up by Dad at the front, so he could pull in Dad's fish. Their guide was older, bronzed face and skin, wavy blonde hair and a quiet grin.

They provided flies and rods, and all the drinks and food we could possibly need. Most importantly though, they are excellent fishermen who know how to teach amateurs like our family. We were all catching fish, with the occasional frustration of getting a fly or line caught on a rock or the bank. Jay looked like a true sailor, looking out over the bow of the boat, telling Dad where he should throw his line in order to "really" get a good one. What these guides thought would be a stressful day on the Snake was turning into peaceful fishing trip.

We stopped for lunch about halfway down the river, and they had turkey sandwiches, salad, homemade brownies, chips and salsa, and more. Mom was trying to tell the guide about Jesus, and Dad was asking them how they got into guiding and how they liked it. Sam and I were probably arguing about who caught had the biggest fish so far. Jay was eating and listening, tuning in every other sentence with a random thought or question, something like, "So have you ever had people fall in the river?" or "Do alligators or sharks ever swim up this far?"

With full bellies, we got back in the boats and continued downstream. A ways down the river, near the end, our guide pulled our boat over so we could stand and fish for a time. Sam was about fifteen yards upstream of me and our guide was teaching him casting techniques. You are supposed to cast the rod directly vertical over your shoulder,

and Sam's cast started to move a little bit more horizontal, causing the line to move the same way, and in my direction. The next thing I know, Sam's line has snapped right in front of me and the hook on his fly had gone through my shorts and into my manhood.

"Ahhhhhhhh!" I screamed bloody murder. Just then the other boat was floating behind us and they heard me and screamed back,

"What happened?"

"Sam hooked me!" they didn't hear me, so I yelled again,

"Sam hooked me!"

"What happened, we can't hear you!" Dad hollered across the water.

"SAM HOOKED ME IN THE PENIS!" I screamed at the top of my lungs.

Jay bellowed over in hysterics and would have wet his pants if he could have. Dad and Mom almost fell out of the boat in laughter. My Guide was both laughing and nervous. He was nervous because it could have been serious, and nervous cause he had to pull it out. It ended up coming out clean since the barb never made it through but it hurt like a gunshot.

When we got back to Jackson the guides were so gracious to us. They told us how unsure they had been about the trip, taking a whole family and a handicapped kid fishing, but how it was one of the best trips they had ever had on the river. Jay told that story to everyone who would listen; the day Sam hooked me where it counts.

We have some great pictures of that day, where Jay is holding up a fish with a big wide brimmed hat and a wide brimmed smile. It was a day where we all lived; watching eagles along the bank, enjoying each other's company and competition, and laughing so hard together.

Someone had told us that President Clinton was in Jackson for a family vacation at the same time we were, but we had not seen him yet. After a few nights of eating at fancy restaurants we saw a great pizza joint called Mile High Pizza Pie that suited us just fine. It was just a little place with a few booths inside and picnic tables outside. We sat at a wooden picnic table right against the window, and Mom went up to order some Pepperoni.

In an instant, the place was surrounded by men with earpieces who were moving the crowd. Mom wasn't paying much attention when she looked to her left and in walked Bill, Hillary, and Chelsea Clinton to eat a pizza. She came out telling us about and we told her that we already knew. They were sitting less than seven feet from us, diagonal to us but inside a large glass window. There we were caught in the middle of a crowd frenzy just trying to eat a pizza.

It was amazing how many people crowded around that little restaurant. One man pulled out a video camera and the Secret Service guy nearly tackled him. They were frisking people left and right. We noticed that some of them were dressed like us and they were infiltrating the crowd. The guy who was in charge was standing right next to Jay. Jay began to tug at his sport coat.

"Excuse me, are you in charge?" Jay asked the man.

A little bit surprised by this kid, the man began to talk to him. Jay asked him how long he had been working. What is President Clinton like? Do you like your job? Have you ever been shot? Are you married? He answered almost all his questions, taking a break for moments at a time to do his job. He told us how he had worked for Carter,

Reagan, Bush Sr., and now Clinton. He said he liked Clinton but not working for him because he was always scared something would happen to him.

"Clinton is young, he always wants to be around people, and that is hard work for us, always looking out for troublemakers. Carter, Reagan, and Bush just wanted to go to a lakeside cottage and relax," he told us.

He ended up giving uws his card and told us to come to Washington to get a special White House tour. We never did and it is a shame, one of the few trips we didn't take.

We never met President Clinton, but Dad did get his attention. I had a Tennessee Volunteers hat on and Dad waved to him and pointed to it. Clinton was from Arkansas and that is a little cross state rivalry I guess. He smiled and gave us a thumbs-up.

I always found it interesting how Jay thought it was cool to see the President, and tell everyone about it, but he just asked that Secret Service man more about himself than anything. Everyone was important to Jay.

Our last full day there in Wyoming we drove up to Yellowstone. There were elk, bison, bears, eagles, geysers, waterfalls, burned forests, moose, thousands of motorcycles, people from all over, beautiful lakes. We saw the Presidential Helicopters that day too. Yellowstone is a paramount life experience, one of those places you have to see before you die. We saw it and loved it. The last great thing was 'Old Faithful.' We got there around sunset, and Mom and Dad were being cheesy, holding hands and flirting like they were still in college. Sam and I took turns carrying Jay and holding him while we waited on the old geyser to spew forth its magic, which it did, of course.

There is a distinct memory in my mind of the four of us; Jay, Dad, Sam, and me standing there as Mom took a picture. It was a really manly trip, and Mom had been a good sport. Jay is on my back looking and Sam is standing there. Dad has that look on his face that he is proud, proud that his sons could see so much and be together in such a way. There we were by 'old faithful,' an irony that fit the scene in so many ways.

Sambo

A chapter on Sam, and the brotherhood and life he shared with Jay at his side for all of his first 11 years of life.

13. Granny and Mary Francis

In Jay's life, many people sacrificed their time, energy, and emotion to helping him develop, grow up, and live richly and blessedly. In that group of servants though, there were two who stand out deeply; Granny, our maternal great-grandmother, and Mary Frances, the dear woman who helped Mom take care of us for so many years. They deserve pages all to themselves, and yet I am putting them together because Jay did something special with both of them before he died. He interviewed them both a number of times in order to write small biographies for a project for my Aunt Jonie, who was teaching him English. Granny talked of growing up without radio and riding horse and buggies before cars were everywhere. Mary Frances shared what it was like to grow up in the Delta of Mississippi during the Civil Rights Era. Both of their stories are extraordinary, and there is a plain irony that Jay preserved their memory, much like I am doing by sharing his life. So, I will tell of them both and their times with Jay and our family, followed by the work that Jay completed on them both.

Granny

Our Granny was a true saint, a matriarch, and that constant heroine to us all when we were kids. Usually great grandmothers can be cranky and a pain to be with or maybe

more like a fine lamp or painting that everyone admires because they are supposed to. But Granny was different. She drove us around in her 81' blue Chevy Impala telling us stories about growing up without radio or TV, talking about World War One as if it were not all that long ago. She couldn't hear that well but she wasn't scared to ask us to speak up into her hearing aid. She couldn't see that well either, but her bi-focles were like a pair of binoculars. Born in 1899, she lived through two world wars, raised three daughters without help from the government, and lived through the agony of losing her only love at age thirty. Granny, or Berta Radford, never looked at another man and she talked about her dear 'Chuck' for the rest of her ninety-nine years. She wore a necklace around her neck with a medallion that had all of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren's names, which numbered near fifty, inscribed on it. She woke up every morning before the sun, and spent hours on her knees praying for every last one of us, for strength, courage, love for the Lord Jesus, compassion, and a patient heart among others.

I don't think she ever got old. I mean she got old in terms of bending over, going really gray, not hearing or seeing too well, but her spirit never got old. She took a few trips around the world after she was eighty, with only a friend or two. She had learned to be independent, living alone for most of her life, counting on nothing but her family, her Bible, and her church. She was a part of everything. At all our births, Granny was there; encouraging, helping, and making sure there was nothing left to be done.

In June of 1986, it was no different. Jay was born, Granny was there, and immediately she began petitioning the Lord to be gracious, to be merciful, and to give her a ministry to this baby boy. A few weeks earlier at the family reunion she had told everyone that she felt like she needed a ministry. Everyone kind of laughed at the thought

that Granny would say such a thing considering how involved she was in the church and women's bible study groups and discipling so many people. When Jay was born she decided she had found a new ministry, helping our family take care of this special child.

At eighty-six years old she learned how to do CPR and the Heimlich maneuver in case something happened to Jay when she was taking care of him. She wasn't strong enough to push down on the airbag so she learned how to do it by sticking it underneath her arms. Mom needed people to learn how to suction Jay as soon as he got the trach and Granny was the first in line. Actually, she was the one who suspected something was wrong with his breathing in the first place. When so many people in our family and community were so downcast and feeling sorry for my parents, Granny seemed to be fully confident that Jay was a gift from God, to be taken care of graciously and patiently, treated as equal and lovable.

As Jay grew, so did Granny's heart for him. Every time Jay was hospitalized for one of his two-dozen operations, Grandmargie would drop Granny off around eight in the morning and leave her there until ten or eleven at night, when Dad would take her home. She watched him sleep, moved his pillows around, fed him, read to him, read to herself, took a nap and snored really loud, which made him laugh. She and Jay were very similar in the way they saw themselves, never really looking inward but always watching for someone new to talk to and interact with. Granny would talk to nurses and ask them questions about where they came from or what their name was, and she usually remembered what they told her.

She babysat us all the time. When Grandmargie and Grandchubby bought that house on Cedarwood, Granny moved in with them soon thereafter, since she was nearing

ninety. We started looking for a house or a lot to build on, and Granny, Grandmargie, and Mom started telling Dad that he needed to find us a house near them. He decided that if three God-fearing women had an idea, he had better take heed. He bought the house down the street on Cedarwood, which meant that Granny could keep us every week. She was much more of a push over than Grandmargie, and Jay could convince her of just about anything; how much TV he was allowed to watch, how much chocolate he could eat, or that his homework wasn't important.

One night Lisa Pounds was taking care of us when Mom and Dad were out of town and we all got the vomits. I was in the bathroom yacking all over the floor, Sam and Clare were doing the same in the bedrooms, and Jay was just watching TV. Lisa couldn't clean it all up and Granny came down and got on her ninety two year old knees and scrubbed our mess until it was clean. She never lost that selflessness and it rubbed off on all of us. We learned to give without expecting to receive. Granny didn't just give without expectations; she cringed at the thought of getting anything in return for her acts of service and love to her family. She was stubborn about it and sometimes it made Dad so mad at her. She wanted to go everywhere and do everything, just like Jay, and she started to be less mobile than him. Every week we took her somewhere in her last two or three years, Sam or I would walk her from the house to the car and it took a good five minutes because her steps were very slow and deliberate, but she was going and there was no question to it.

Usually when we rode our bikes to their house, or Jay would roll down, we would knock on the door and ring the doorbell for a long time before she would come, and I get tears in my eyes thinking about it. We could hear her coming, her necklaces with our

names on them jingling on her neck as she slowly sauntered to the door to let us in, and she always kissed us and held us tight, asked us what had been going on in our young lives. We watched her read all day using the big lighted magnifying glass and talking on her phone, telling stories in between, so curious to help, so ready to love.

She went home to be with the Lord about four months before Jay. She was ninety-nine, and she just ran out of gas. One time she told Mom that she wasn't going to die because she didn't have enough time. It is fitting that Jay spent the time to preserve her memory. It is also fitting that she went home first, or she would have died of a broken heart when Jay departed. God knows he needed someone to greet him in heaven.

INSERT JAY'S INTERVIEW WITH GRANNY (still being edited)

Mary Francis

Mom and Dad were out of town that weekend, and as usual, Mary Frances was taking care of us for the weekend. It was either her or Grandmargie, and we loved having either one of them, but we could always get away with more when Mary Francis kept us. She cooked for us, better than Mom could, and drove us around and dropped us off to soccer or baseball or youth group or whatever. I don't remember when she started working at our house, because I think I was a baby. But she came about two or three times a week, and on weekends when Mom and Dad went out of town, which was often.

Well, that particular weekend, Mary Frances' husband Frank was over too. He usually showed up around nine or ten after he got off work. He painted houses and ran the maintenance at a local church. He was big, with huge strong arms and rough working

hands. He brought me a construction hat when I was about three and I still have it. He never said too much, but laughed and smiled a lot, especially when Jay was around. Mary Francis had put Jay in the bathtub and had just finished scrubbing him down. Jay was probably eight or so, and he pooped in the bathtub and yelled out to Mary Francis,

"Uh Oh! Mary Francis help me!" She walked in and started giggling as there were little floating turds in the bathtub. She hollered at Frank,

"Frank, come and get Jay outta this tub!" Frank came in and saw what had happened and by this time all three of them were in hysterics.

"Huh, I gotta get him out the tub?" Frank asked.

"Frank, I didn't mean to do that, get me out!" Jay was ready to get out of the poopy water by now but Frank couldn't quit laughing. He finally pulled Jay out and they had a good laugh and a bonding experience.

Mary Francis took great care of Jay. She catheterized him more than anyone besides Mom, bathed him, gave him his shots, brushed his teeth, tucked him in, did homework with him, and changed thousands of stinky diapers, as she was a second mother to us. She impacted our childhood as much as anything else. She knew us, and we shared our lives with her, telling her our stories about the day's events at school or football practice, and she cared. Mom and her were soul mates too, always sharing with each other and praying for each other.

Jay also liked to pray with Mary Frances. Whenever we prayed as a family, Jay usually cried when it was his turn, and I think it had something to do with being overwhelmed by how close we were, and how much we took care of him, but really I don't know. I do know that he loved to pray with other people, especially Mary Francis.

Many days, it would just be herand Jay at home during lunch, with Mom out running errands. She would make him a sandwich and they would sit and talk. Jay told her about some of his friends or families that he knew were going through hard times and he would ask if they could pray for them. They prayed for those people by name, and asked the Lord to bring mercy or to help people with health problems.

He told her that someday he was going to be a football coach.

"When I grow up Mary Francis, I am going to be a football coach, a good one," He said all the time.

"Jay, you will make a great football coach," she encouraged.

"I know I will be. Just about the best one around." He lacked no confidence.

One afternoon, when Mary Francis was driving Jay somewhere in our big conversion van with the wheelchair lift on it, she forgot to slide the lift back under the van. After driving with it sticking out of the side of the van for a few blocks, Jay heard the noise of something scratching the asphalt next to the van.

"Mary Francis, what's that noise?"

"I don't know."

"Something is going on with the car, Mary Francis." She stopped and got out of the car and saw the lift still out. She opened the door and Jay covered his shaking head with his hands, saying,

"Dangit, Mary Francis, Don't tell me you forgot to put the lift in?"

"Yeah, I sure did. It's a good thing we didn't hurt anyone."

"You got that right!"

Another time in the van, Roscoe, our little white Bichon-Frise dog, was going with them. He was getting old and had started to growl and bark all the time. He growled and barked at Jay and Jay got scared fast, screaming for help from Mary Frances. When she finally got the door open, Jay sighed and said,

"Man, what is wrong with that dog. I almost peed on myself!"

She says Jay maintained that selfless sense of humor that poured itself on those around him. She says he wasn't hard to take care of, usually cooperating and grateful to her for taking care of him, but of course there were days when he was a pain in the butt. He played tricks on her, but she laughed and played along. She says Jay loved the simple things like movies, hamburgers at Wendy's or McDonald's with mayonnaise and tomatoes only, or how much he loved it when she would read to him, or let him talk on the phone to his friends. She loved his weak voice and sweet and tender spirit, that undying love of laughter that she says brightened her life.

When she told me of what she remembered of Jay, I thought about what I remembered of her. I loved the simple things about Mary Francis that her so special to me, to Clare and Sam, my parents, and to Jay; that total selflessness, her interest in other people and wanting to take care of them. She was funny and laughed often, I loved it when she read to us as children. She told me that the most poignant description of Jay was his thoughtfulness, and yet she was the most thoughtful.

"I miss him, Drew, I miss him still," she told me a few months ago. It was like losing a child for her. She put so much effort into his life. She recalls not noticing anything different those last few weeks. She had not been working because she had some other responsibilities, but she had been around still. He was planning a date. He was

ready to go back to ECS. That is what Mary Francis remembers, a boy who loves pennies, loves girls, loves jokes, and loves to care for others. She deals with the absence of Jay by remembering the presence of Jay, and that brings a great comfort.

Jay's Interview with Mary Francis

"Mary Francie Covington Edmond"

"She was born in Turrell, Arkansas on September 12, 1943. All of her life she thought her birthday was the 21st because of the poor black education back then. They wrote it wrong and she still celebrates it on the 21st. It wasn't until she was 21 and went to get her driver's license and had to find her birth certificate that she found out the correct date. When she was six, they moved to Tunica, Mississippi to work on a plantation farm. She grew up there.

"My parents farmed, gardened and picked cotton six days a week, sun-up to sun-down. It had to be a pouring down rainy day to have any days off, except for Sunday. My daddy used to hunt for our extra food. He used to catch minks and coons, skin their hides, bring them to Memphis and sell them. He could keep that money. He had a big garden called a "truck patch." He would bring a wad of watermelons to sell in Memphis. My mom had a # 3 tub and a rub board and that's how we first washed clothes. We hung them on a barbed wire fence, often scratching our hands taking down clothes."
Mary Francis had seven brothers and four sisters, equaling twelve kids total.

Her Brothers are, Robert Lee, Jerry, Isaac, Henry, Andrew, John Henry, and Charlie. Her sisters are Minnie Lee, Rubie Lee, Earline, and Odell.

Mary Francis attended Hopewell School.

"We played softball. Our games were: Little Sally Walker Sitting on a Saucer and Duck, Duck, Goose. There were no organized sports. We'd go on the levy and play beside it.

"We couldn't go to school much because we had to gather the "white man's crops." He would tell daddy to keep us at home until we gathered all the crop. I wasn't glad when we missed school but we weren't learning much because there was only one teacher. She was black, and she taught fifty or sixty kids on the plantation. I went through the ninth grade but didn't learn much. At that time, I don't think the teachers even knew that much. I didn't even learn how to read and write that good, just a little. Playing ball was our happiest times.

"My neighborhood was the plantation. Houses were spread far apart, some even a mile apart. Only 2 other houses were near me. My husband's house wasn't far even though it was on another plantation. My friend Clara Bell was the other house. There were no telephones for us back then, no movies. I remember when we didn't have electricity, I was ten years old when we went from lamplight to electricity. The thing we looked forward to was going downtown to the Juke House and going dancing on Saturday night. We starting going at 13, 14, and 15.

"We were poor but we felt rich. We never went without food. My grandfather raised hogs and cows and we had vegetables and our chickens laid eggs. We didn't even have to buy lard. They'd cooked the middle of the hog and

get the grease out of it and that was our grease. My mama made soap out of something? She made jelly too. She first sewed our clothes but later got a sewing machine foot pedal. Most of the shows in town cost us one dollar.

"My Dad's mom was a very sweet Christian lady. She did not drink, and loved all of us. Her husband drank all the time, farmed some. He was nice except when he was drinking. My mom's dad worked on a railroad track and that's how he died when she was 6. Her mother, my grandmother, was Minnie and was a very loving woman.

" We have no old pictures, they burned when my house burned down. I had an aunt with 23 kids. To women back then, 17 to 18 kids wasn't anything. We had our church-Hopewell Church-next to our school. It was Baptist.

"My parents drank on the weekends. Dad drank more than mom. Daddy was wild at times and they fought some. He had to quit drinking when the doctor told him the chest pain was caused by drinking and it would kill him if he didn't stop."

Racism Memories

"We could go downtown but only to certain stores. There were even lakes where we could not go fishing because we were colored. We were called "niggers" at times. My daddy kicked the plantation owner's son even when he was older, for calling him a black *ss nigger. We all talked about how when we got older we were getting of this plantation. We could only see the doctor on certain days and even then when we told our boss we needed a doctor, he'd tell us when we could go. My mom did a lot of her own medical treatment with home

remedies. Mostly we went to the doctor for bad cuts. Mom delivered a lot of babies and was respected by the people on the plantation.

"I met Frank at school when I was ten. We got married in 1961 when I was eighteen. We went to the courthouse in Tunica and the judge married us. We lived on the plantation I grew up on, and Frank worked there too. He was a tractor driver and I was a field hand. I still worked in the fields as I had before. Yes, those years were hard-working from sun-up till sun down twelve to fourteen hours a day. We made $2.50 a day each. That is not as bad as it sounds because the prices of things were not high at all. We lived there at the plantation for two years after we were married and then we moved to Memphis.

"I had my first child when I was sixteen...before marriage. By the time I was 27 I had eight children but only six of them lived. When we came to Memphis, Frank started working at a car wash. Two years later I went to work at the Travelodge. I worked there for three years. I worked at the Peabody Hotel, and the Days Inn. I'd work a while then quit because the kids were young and it was tough leaving them. Mom or my sister kept the kids. Then Lois kept them when she was about 12 or 13. Then I started working in private homes. Every home I have worked in has a child that is special. Nancy and Hamp's home is the fourth home. I have worked there for over sixteen years.

"My children didn't have too many experiences with racism. One white teacher called one of my girls a 'nigger'. They got rid of that teacher. I have never had any bad experiences and if Frank did he hasn't said much about it.

"I kept my faith by knowing how to pray and by going to church. I thank God for a pastor who teaches the Bible. There were times I felt like chunking my faith, but I knew those were times the devil was speaking to me.

"The lessons I've learned are: get in church, read your Bible, get under a Godly leader, date a believer in Christ, do what is right and 'lean not on your own understanding," follow the scripture, self talks to you to do wrong, not right. That's why the Bible's words are so important. Things will work out."

14. The Barn

We had been building our new house for over a year and it still wasn't ready for us to move in it yet. After living on Cedarwood for nearly ten years, Dad was ready to build and move back in to Memphis, closer to work, closer to school for us, and closer to church too. We had spent many late nights walking around the new house. At first we just walked around the lot, then the concrete foundation, and the framing, then the sheetrock and the roofing. It was a blast to watch Dad get excited as he picked out every little thing for the house. Jay probably had more fun watching it come together than anyone, with the low light switches, low microwave, ice machine, special bathtub and bunk beds, but most of all he was pumped about having an elevator, which meant he could go anywhere in the house without any help.

With all that preparation there was no way it could have been finished as fast as I expected, but that meant we were going to get to live out at Uncle David's Farm after we moved out of Cedarwood. I remember talking about it after we had sold our house. We would spend a few months there at the barn while we waited for the house to be finished. Sam and I were the most thrilled because of the four wheelers and the openness of the place, which meant I could take Mom's GMC Yukon back there and shoot my shotgun

and the twenty-two rifle all day if I wanted. Growing up in the suburbs always leaves boys wanting to get out in the open and we wanted to.

We had started going out to Uncle David and Aunt Connie's place when we were just kids at the family reunions. Since it was so close to Memphis, and there was so much for us kids to do it made perfect sense, and they were always so generous to have everyone out there. Uncle David is a really big guy who is soft spoken, with a deep voice and wavy light brown hair. He flies planes and helicopters and rides motorcycles so all the boys think he is a stud. Their place was east of Memphis, about forty or fifty acres of woodland sitting near the Wolf River. About ten of the acres were wide open and the kids would swim, ride horses, or drive four wheelers and dirt bikes down dirt tracks and through ditches until the fuel tanks were empty. We fought over who got to go next and made fun of each other if the engine stalled or the bike flipped. Everybody got hurt sometime but that was part of the fun. My personal favorite was one afternoon when I was driving a dunebuggy on the levee that kept two creeks separated and I was pushing it full throttle. It felt like eighty miles an hour and I lost control and flipped the darn thing into the ditch and I went with it. When I finally got up, there was a herd of cousins and uncles tearing through the field thinking I was hurt, or maybe dead. I was fine, not a scratch on me. I think I was only ten or eleven, but on that day, I was a man.

When we moved out there to live for a few months, it was November of my sophomore year of high school. Sam was ten, Clare was a junior, and Jay was twelve. I knew it was going to be hard having to move Jay up and down the stairs all the time, but it was something we were sure used to by then. We were going to be living in an apartment that was above the barn that had one great room that was dominated by an old

pool table, one couch, and a little box TV. The kitchen was at one end, and there were two small bedrooms and a little bathroom. The main bedroom was in the middle and there was a little deck that opened up directly over the main field in the back.

The first day there was somewhat traumatic for Mom. Mary Francis had come over to help her clean the place up and make it livable for us because no one had lived there for a while and it needed a little extra spring-cleaning. Together, she and Mom found lots of molded food in the fridge and about three dead mice in the cupboard. Mary Francis screamed like a little girl in a haunted house and ran out of the kitchen. They laughed and got it all fixed up nice. I knew Mom was worried about being cold and having Jay be so confined to one little place. Jay was mostly worried at first because he learned that the room he was sleeping in was pink.

"I am NOT sleeping in this pink room!" he said emphatically. The pink room is where David and Connie's two daughters, Ashley and Stephanie, had slept when they were building their house years earlier. Sam and I were in David Jr.'s room, which was gray or green or brown. There was not enough room for three of us, so Jay got stuck living with Clare in a pink room. He ended up loving it because Clare was sweet to him as always and took much better care of him at night than Sam and me would have. He woke up early in the mornings and played Clare's CD's as we got ready for school. I remember him continually playing a rap song with the words, "Boom, Boom, let me hear you so way-o, way-o. Girl your booty is so round, let me look you up and down..." and laughing until he got into trouble.

Sam and I were at that stage where I liked to give him a fair share of harassment. There was only about a ten-inch space between the double bed we were sharing, and one

night I pushed him off the bed into the crevice between the wall and the bed and wouldn't let him up. He couldn't scream either or I would've hit him with the pillow. I kept him there for about a half hour. There was also a hatch door in the floor of our room that had a wooden ladder down to the barn so we could get out any time we wanted.

It was really a happy time for our family because we were living in such close quarters and there was no distraction except deer in the early mornings and thousands of stars at night. We ate dinner on the couch, played pool, shot the rifle off of the deck, carried Jay up and down those dang stairs anytime he and his buddies wanted to play basketball downstairs and outside, then change their minds and want to play Nintendo upstairs.

Jay was home schooling at that point, so he spent most of his day at a little table in the kitchen, with Mom sitting beside him helping or doing other things around the little barn. He worked pretty hard on math or science or grammar, until he was distracted by a Jerry Lewis movie on AMC or Sportscenter on ESPN. He especially loved watching all the Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin collaborations. I cannot forget walking in from school to him sitting too close to the TV with his thumb in his mouth.

We were there during the late autumn and the entire winter, which was fabulous because I love the cold, and I rode those four wheelers in that cold nearly every day. There were trails that led all the way back to the river and Sam and I, or some of my buddies, would go till the sun came down and sometimes even later if Mom wasn't cooking. Most of my friends could drive by then and a lot of them had trucks or 4-wheel drive. One night, one of my closest friends Brad came over with his Chevy Tahoe and he wanted to take it out in the mud to see how it would do. I threw Jay in the back seat.

Whoever else was there hopped in with us. Brad was driving through the back acres, there was a sharp turn in the mud, and being the proper driver and city slicker that he was he turned his blinker on to make the turn and we laughed at him all the way back to the barn. Jay was never scared to give my friends some sarcasm and Brad got it on that night.

One of Jay's friends, Noah Wells, lived around the corner and Jay called him to come over and play all the time. They had gotten to know each other through church, and Noah was also on Jay's Saturday League team when they were younger. Noah was the athletic and busy type, so Jay loved to watch him shoot hoops or throw the football with Sam. Noah also had a dirt bike and he rode around the barn and the little basketball area next to it and Jay watched him go. Noah invited Jay over to his house almost every week. Mr. Wells had known Jay from the nursery at church and they had him over to watch Pay Per View Professional Wrestling on the big screen TV. Jay had been to see wrestling live a couple of times before with John Martinez, and Dad took us a couple of times too. It was a weekly event that we would turn on TNT to watch Monday Night Wrestling with Hulk Hogan and Mom would come in and get disgusted and walk out. Dad and us boys would laugh and then we would talk about it at school the next day with all the other wrestling fans.

Jay also went over to the Wells' to hang out with guys from church or school. Noah had a pool table and Jay learned to throw the white ball and bet Noah pennies that he could make shots. There was a pool table at the barn too and they would throw the balls, make bets, then get Mom to carry Jay downstairs so they could play there, then watch TV, or go see if Uncle David or Aunt Connie were home, or go riding on the four wheelers.

The Wells took Jay to Noah's basketball games on occasion, putting Jay in the back of their Land Cruiser facing backwards, strapping down his chair and hitting the road. One particular night it was raining cold sleet and the other boys were complaining about the cold and inclement weather, but Jay didn't. On the way home, Mr. Wells asked Jay,

"Do you want some doughnuts?"

"No, but my family would like some."

"Jay, what kind do they like?"

"Have you seen my family? They will eat anything!" he ended.

Never scared to get a laugh, but always thinking of others, he took good care of his family. Jay called the Wells house often and late. Usually sometime after eleven, when we were still wide awake, Jay would call and ask to speak with Noah.

"Jay, Noah is in bed, he has school tomorrow and it is eleven o'clock." Mr. Wells always spoke to him very patiently at such a late hour. Jay would thank him and say he would just try him tomorrow, and about five minutes later he would call again.

"Mr. Wells, I know it is late and Noah is asleep, but what are you up to?" he would ask as if he sincerely wanted to know.

"Well, Jay, I am just reading the newspaper and watching a little TV."

"How have you been doing...How is business...What are you watching on TV?" A few nights later Jay would do the same thing. Once we were out of the barn and into our new house, Jay would sneak off into the elevator and call people late, many times Mr. Wells or Noah.

One of the highlights of living in the barn was riding around with Uncle Dave in the helicopter. He learned to fly when he was in college and has been flying ever since. He had a little two-seater helicopter that he flew to see real estate or fly to business meetings down in the Mississippi Delta, but really it was for fun. It seems like he flew almost every day we were there, and whoever was nearby when he drove down to the shed got to go with him. It was usually Sam. He sat out there and just waited for Uncle David to come home because he knew he would go flying. Jay hated the idea at first and was scared to death of getting in that contraption. Sam and Uncle David would be flying it around the field knocking over and picking up orange road cones with the legs of the helicopter for practice and Jay wanted nothing to do with it. After much coaxing, he finally went up with him and loved to tell everyone about it, although he didn't love it all that much since it scared him and it was so loud.

He loved talking about the barn in general and I think that it was a special time for all of us. We really got to get away from everything else and just be a family, something we had done before but just not for long period of time. We spent a lot of time just talking in Mom and Dad's room there, watching movies, camping out, and playing in the snow with four wheelers. It was one of the happiest times.

His Own Words

Every school day when Jay was in sixth and seventh grade, he recorded ten blessings in a notebook. I will scan and include many of them, for the reader to see Jay and hear him, in his own words.

15. Chicago

Jay had been home schooling for a while, yet he still managed to keep close relationships with the other kids who remained at ECS. They had even let him sit in on a few classes at the Ridgelake Branch campus. However, when it was time for sixth grade, all of Jay's friends had moved to the main campus, and there were too many complications for Jay to keep on going. So for sixth and seventh grade, he had been home schooling.

Every year all the ECS seventh graders pile into the Amtrak trains from Memphis and ride to Chicago. Once they get there, they stay in a downtown hotel, visit museums, see movies, and have all sorts of programs and speakers. A number of parents go as well.

I remember my Chicago trip in seventh grade. I was friends with all the cool kids, but not necessarily one myself. My parents were going, but I thought I was a little too cool for them and I sadly tried to distance myself from them some of the time. The funny part is that my parents were probably some of the coolest parents there. But I remember well how fun the trip was, the train ride, staying up all night, the angst of being that age with an awkward shape and awkward red pimples on my face. I had a girlfriend then, my

first one and we held hands on the train, and the rest of the time I was trying to be cool and fit in with the athletes. But that is seventh grade.

Dad talked the school into letting Jay and him go on the trip since Clare and I were students and Jay had gone for years. Because Jay had to sleep with the oxygen machine, he and Dad flew to Chicago instead of taking the train and they met up with the rest of the group a day later. They barely caught their flight to Chicago and the security thought the oxygen machine was combustible and it took Dad lots of explaining to convince them it had no oxygen in it, and that it simply took the atmospheric air and turned it into breathable oxygen.

Once they got to Chicago, the town car Dad had arranged to take them to the hotel wasn't big enough to hold the wheelchair, the oxygen machine, and the rest of the usual luggage. The driver told Dad he couldn't fit everything in there, and Dad responded by telling him,

"Well someone has to pick us up, I called and told you that we would have all this stuff and we have to get to the hotel somehow."

"We'll take care of it sir, just wait about five minutes." Five minutes is a long time in the January wind and cold of Chicago. It snowed about five inches a day while they were there, and it didn't melt away, it just piled up. Minutes later, a stretch limo pulled up, the driver got out, and said to Dad, "You Holcomb?"

"Yep."

"Well, I am here to pick you up sir." Jay's eyes got wide like an owl and he stared inquisitively at Dad, looked at the limo, and blurted, "We riding in this?"

"Yeah, Jay."

"Awesome!" he said with eyes closed, fists thrown up in a clinch, "Man this is cool!" They sat in the far back, and Jay insisted that the driver keep the dividing window open and he asked him questions about who he driven as passengers, and entertained him for awhile. He also called Mom and some other people to tell them about riding in a limo like a pro ball player or movie star.

The hotel was a downtown Marriot, the kind with the simple hotel restaurants in the lobby that serves eggs and bacon that costs more than a steak dinner, but they needed some breakfast, so they went. Dad carried Jay's plate, but Jay filled it himself at the buffet, telling Dad to give him some eggs or put some bacon on his plate. That boy could eat; it took a while, but he could eat, and more than most boys his age. After a few minutes he started to look stressed and it seemed like he was choking. He was breathing but couldn't swallow anything. He was trying to push it out and making all sorts of little noises.

"Jay, are you choking?" Dad asked. He nodded his head yes.

"Jay, can you breath?" he nodded yes again. After taking a deep breath or two, he proceeded to gargle his throat, pushing hard to try to eject whatever was in his throat, but it wouldn't budge. He was drooling by now and getting frustrated that he couldn't get it out. Dad knew not to intervene as long as he was breathing. People at the table to the left and the right got up to get more food at the buffet and didn't return to the same seats, probably grossed out by the constant gagging.

This continued for longer than ten minutes, and he seemed to get closer every time, and Dad was patiently trying to coach him through the coughing process, seemingly to no avail. A little piece of egg came flying out at one point, but it was obviously not

what was causing the ruckus. By now, Dad was asking himself how much longer to wait before he needed to flip him up and do the Heimlich on him.

"Do you want help?" He answered with an emphatically head notion that said 'no'.

"Jay, if you don't get it up, I am going to have help soon. Are you in distress?" He shook his head no, then Dad asked him,

"Are you stressed?" He shook his head yes, sweat dripping from his forehead, eyes glazed over and looking intently at Dad. He was starting to turn red, and then he breathed deep, choked and coughed with all the energy he could muster, twice. On the second try, a cheese blitz as long as my index finger came soaring out of his mouth and onto the table.

"Damnit, Jay, why do you take such big bites?" My dad blurted, or least that is what Jay said he blurted. Dad was relieved, sweating, and scared to death. Jay laughed, saying, "That was a big one."

Jay and Dad always turned everything that happened into a good story, and sometimes they differed on the points they thought were the most important. Jay loved telling people about Dad saying the D-word, more so because he liked to repeat it than it was that important to the story. Once the train full of seventh graders got to Chicago later that morning, Jay was telling them immediately how he almost died on a cheese blitz at breakfast, and three feet away Dad was doing the same thing to the parents, both holding court, both feeding off of each others love of the story.

The week was supposed to be spent going to all the museums, eating with the group at night, but Dad, Jay, Dr. Ken Groshart, and Kenny made other plans every night

and some of the days. They usually invited other people to go with them, to fun restaurants like Ed Debevic's, a 50's-esque diner where the waiters and waitresses are sarcastic with the customers and they dance on the bar to Elvis and Buddy Holly, making milk shakes, burgers, and greasy French fries, or to a Bulls game, or even shopping at the Water Tower mall.

The kids from school helped out with carrying Jay, especially Kenny, who hardly left his side. The museums interested Jay somewhat, but of mainly he just wanted to be with the other kids, tell stories about choking on cheese blitzes, going to see Scottie Pippen, and taking a little drink of beer at the Berghof.

According to Dad, the Berghof was the first place to receive an alcohol license after prohibition was repealed in the nineteen thirties. It is also one of the oldest microbreweries in the country, dating to 1894. Dad and Dr. Groshart had decided to take the boys there to eat a nice dinner. On the way there it was still snowing, and they came to the block where they thought the place was, but Dad couldn't remember whether to turn left or right. He walked Jay to the corner of the street where the ramps are under the light poles, and left him there for a few seconds as he walked around trying to navigate to the Berghof.

It was way below freezing, and snowing. Jay sat there totally bundled up in his wheelchair, when out of the moment a huge city bus come crawling around the corner, and rammed through a pile of slushy white snow and dirty street soot, and sent it soaring like an ocean wave across Jay, his wheelchair, leaving a solid line of slush dripping in a nice line across his face, covering his right eyeglass and leaving the left one spotless. Dad

saw it coming but was too far away to move Jay in time, and in slow motion he turned and bolted back towards Jay in vain.

All three of them stopped and waited for Jay to say something and they didn't have to wait long.

"Dad, do you mind moving me back a little bit?" he said as though nothing fantastic or awful had just happened.

"Man, that was cold!" he told Dr. Groshart and Kenny as Dad cleaned him up.

They found the Berghof a few minutes later but couldn't get Jay in the front door because it was revolving. Dad went in to reserve a table, and they waited outside while a table was prepared. Once they got it ready, Dad had to wheel Jay into the Berghof bar, which was separate from the restaurant. It was full of twenty and thirty something's meeting after work and looking for companions, and in walks this forty-year old man with a thirteen-year old boy, in a wheelchair, covered in street slush. It was packed and the door into the restaurant was right smack in the middle of the crowd. Dad pushed Jay through and his eyes were butt level with all the patrons, in their dark suits, and shiny silk ties. Dad rolled him through all the people, left him by the door, and told him to stay there until he came through on the other side.

"Are you leaving me in here?" Jay questioned.

"I don't think you can get out, and nobody's gonna kidnap you. It will only be a few minutes, just sit tight." Dad answered.

"Well," he looked around, "Hurry up."

Walking out of the bar, through the chilly street, back into the restaurant, and then heading towards their table, Dad approached the door, and there was a man sitting with his wife or girlfriend, and his chair leg was blocking the door.

"Excuse me Sir, I need to get through there," said Dad.

"What?" the man responded, clearly bothered, and Dad repeated himself and the man said, "You have to go around through the street if you want to get to the bar."

"The matri'di told me to use this door." We all loved these little moments when someone was being really arrogant and selfish. After Dad's last comment, the man acted seriously disrupted, and he grabbed his napkin, stood up, and said,

"Whatever!"

Dad opened the door and went in, grabbed Jay and pushed him through the door, then looked at the man and said,

"That is the only handicap accessible door in the restaurant, sorry we had to bother you," with a tone of sarcasm in his voice. Dad said the look on the man's face was priceless, like he had seen a ghost, apologizing and stumbling his words all over himself; we loved it when that happened.

The Berghof itself is best described by Dr. Groshart.

"It is an aged brick structure… that carries the pinnash and arrogance of old world values. The waiters are older, and seemed to have been working there for some time. There is that big city feel marked by a darkly lit old world ambiance, with dark wood walls and tables rubbed to a pit by hands and age. Old and young Chicagoans alike fill the empty tables and barstools."

It sounds like the kind of place I would love, and Jay loved it too. The part he liked the best was what happened after they were finally seated. Dr. Groshart mentioned that they should all try the beer sampler, as a celebration of the boys reaching the seventh grade and becoming young men. Dad was a little apprehensive at first, simply because he doesn't drink and neither does my mother, but he gave in and the waiter brought out a tray of sample glasses with a Pale Ale, an Amber Ale, and some Dark Ale, or a similar concoction. When Dr. Groshart asked if they wanted to participate, Jay looked at Dad and said emphatically, "yeah, yeah!" without any hesitation. They toasted the two boys, Jay held his beer in his hand, looked over his glasses at Dad for the approval, and then he took a sip.

Jay looked at Dad a second time, looked back at his glass, at Dad again, then downed the rest of it. He knew what he could get away with, and he never missed the chance to tow the line.

"That was good!" Jay was pretty excited about his first beer.

"You don't know if that was good beer, Jay," Dad told him.

"I'm telling you, that was good beer." Jay finished. They sat there and enjoyed the soft tones of the wood walls, and the brotherly and confident conversation that boys and their dads carry when they are together. They ate steak, Jay probably ordered the priciest thing on the menu. Dad and Dr. Groshart went home heroes to Jay and Kenny, and the boys felt more like men when the night was over.

It is good that there were some fun experiences and good laughs on that trip to Chicago, for it was one of the last. After all the ECS kids and their parents left Chicago and boarded a train headed back to Memphis, Jay and Dad were back alone for one more

night in the Windy City. They had a room in a high tower hotel that overlooked the city night lights. After Jay had gone to sleep and was breathing on his oxygen machine, after being catheterized, changed, given his shot and medicines; Dad was sitting outside on the little deck, talking to Mom on the phone. He felt heavy. Heavy because it seemed that there were little sparks of a future that didn't look so good. Little instances that said Jay was beginning to not fit in as well, that seventh grade kids were becoming too self aware to act like nothing was different about Jay. This was a pain that dug deep into my Dad.

Little did they know that a great mercy was about to happen; a mercy that kept Jay from the hard years, the possible rejection. Mom and Dad had been worrying about who Jay would take to prom, and whether he would drive, or have a good job, or even go to college. Instead of having to face those tough years, the Lord came down and took his child home, and although we were left desolate, broken-hearted, and burning with questions of 'why,' we were left with the good memories, the memories of Jay having his first sip of beer, choking on cheese blitzes, riding in limos, and so many more that I have written here. That is the great mercy of it all, that the suffering Savior took his suffering child home, from a broken and rejecting world.

16. A Usual Summer

I was really looking forward to my long trip to the Dominican Republic for a lot of reasons. Junior Year had been a lot of fun but it ended strangely. Most of my friends in high school were Clare's age, and they had all graduated, and there was some disconnect between them and myself. I was also really sad to be seeing Clare leave me, since we had been near each other's sides for so long. There was also the fact that I had broken a heart and had mine broken all in a short time, and I just needed to be gone for most of the summer.

Caleb and I had talked about going down to the Dominican since the Fall of that school year, 98-99, and slowly it worked out. His older brother Farr knew a missionary family from when he lived in Guatemala City for a year after college, and the family had since moved to the Dominican Republic. The idea sounded spectacular. Caleb and I had taken some sort of trip together nearly every summer since we were kids, usually camp or something, but this was the kicker. I was going to be there for six weeks, then come home and work, but Caleb was going to stay the entire summer. I had been on a Missions trip before, but not outside the US, and there was a certain romance to the idea. I was hoping to accomplish two things while I was there; first, to see if missions was something I would be interested in down the road, and second, to really learn Spanish in a native setting. I was soon to learn that neither of these would really be accomplished. I had ideas

of living in a jungle setting without electricity, talking to native Dominicans and being able to share the Gospel with them or just share their culture and mine.

Mom, Jay, and Sam took Caleb and I to the airport to catch our plane to Atlanta, then Miami, then Puerta Plata. We stopped and ate breakfast at the airport McDonald's. Little did I know that would be the last time I would see Jay. McDonald's was putting minature beany babies in the kid's meals, and Jay ordered one. It was a squirrel, aptly named 'nuts', which gave us occasion for some serious laughter.

"Jay, pass me my nuts." I said and we laughed and this went on. After we ate, I said goodbye to them, Mom cried as she does every time I leave to go somewhere, which is often. I looked back at them after I passed through the security gate, as proud of two younger brothers as I could possibly be. I wrote them a letter from that little island telling them how proud of them I was, and admonishing them with brotherly advice.

I forgot about that letter for a long while after Jay died three weeks later. It was not until Christmas that I found it in a box in Sam and Jay's bedroom. I wrote in on June 3rd, after being gone for only six days, feeling a little nostalgic with the changes occurring in my life.

> "I miss you guys and cant wait to see you," I told them.
>
> "I want to tell you to love God with your whole life, and not just some of it...you are about to be in trying years, your friends will change, you will get new friends and girl friends, and Clare and I will be gone before you know it.... Be a light for the Gospel, everything else doesn't matter in the long run. I love you both very much.... I wish I could go back and spend more time with you because now I have only one year left and so little

time with you... Be thankful for our family... I will always pray for both of you to live for God and for his Kingdom. I can't wait to see you when I get home.... Love, Drew"

I attached a verse too, Philippians 1:3, which reads, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you." I am amazed that I wrote that letter at that time. I was boiling over with things to tell them, as if I had forgotten to in the past. Mom told me that when the letter came, Jay was so excited to tell everyone about how well his older brother was doing in the Dominican Republic, and how cheerful the letter made him. God was good to give me that, a final say, a final admonition, and a final goodbye.

The three weeks I was in the city of Santiago with the missionary family were frustrating to say the least. Without going into much detail, the frustration stemmed from the fact that they lived in nice house, gated from the rest of the community, had most the amenities I had at home, and the work we were doing consisted of passing out tracts on the street. It was hardly what I expected. I didn't get to practice Spanish very much because we were too busy cutting grass and washing cars. Obviously, some of the frustration was my own fault, because I was a little intimidated about going out into the city alone, but none of them would accompany Caleb and me. I did read Dostoevsky's ***Crime and Punishment*** in less than two weeks. Instantly, it became my favorite book, because of the theme of redemption through suffering. I was unaware of how that theme would shape the near future.

While I was away, the summer was going on as usual back home in Memphis. Sam was busy playing competitive baseball, having to spend the weekends at tournaments both in Memphis and out of town. Sam was getting bigger, still a boy, but

getting bigger. He still had a baby face complexion, mixed with that dark straight brown hair cut neatly around his head, and dark brown eyes to match. He was still as fiery as ever too, with an energy the rest of us could hardly match. Having just finished his last year of elementary school, Sam was pumped about being on the main ECS campus on Macon road for his first year of middle school. He was one of the popular kids; big, handsome, athletic, talkative and very friendly. He already knew a bunch of people out at the Macon campus who were my friends or Jay's from church and elementary days. Thinking about girls and playing football were at the front of his mind.

Clare had just graduated, and was planning on going down to the University of Mississippi, or Ole Miss as most people call it. Oxford, the university's hometown, is only an hour's drive from our house. Clare got some scholarship money, many of her friends were going there, and I am sure she also just wanted to be close to home to help Mom out with taking care of Jay and being with us. Clare was always tenderhearted and family came first for her, especially being the oldest and only girl. Her summer was in limbo, having had a trip to Europe not go through as she had expected, and really wanting to go on a girl's trip to Florida or something similar.

She did take a trip down to the beach with Aunt Brenda and Rebecca for a week in late May, but that was a yearly event. Jay called them one afternoon after he had talked to Coach Danner, the middle school principal at ECS. Coach Danner had been talking to Mom and Dad about figuring out how Jay could somehow be involved in classes at ECS with all his other eighth grade friends. The steps and lack of handicapped accessibility were an issue at first, but one that was resolved by the simple fact that eighth grade boys were strong enough to carry Jay up a flight of stairs. Finally they worked it out that Jay

was going to come every morning to classes and audit them with the other students, and Mom would home school the rest of the time, and over time he would be able to fully re-enroll. Jay was pumped and talked to Brenda and Clare about it for twenty or thirty minutes.

It was out of the ordinary for him to be so excited. Ever since those series of decompression surgeries a year and a half earlier, Jay had not quite been himself. The seizure medicine changed his personality. He was tired much more often and less talkative to everyone, much more content to play with his pennies and roll ribbon than to have a long phone conversation. Not to say the regular things stopped, he just had less energy in general. They took him off the medicine in the winter of that year, and slowly he was back, telling jokes, and having a general excitement about him. Clare says that was the first long phone conversation she had had with him in what seemed like a year or longer.

Mom was still busy being Mom, taking care of us driving Sam and Jay here and there, helping out however we needed her too, with a glad heart. She was busy too preparing to have Dad's sister Aunt Louie, her husband Uncle Lee, and our two cousins, Peter and Sarah, to stay at our house while they looked to buy one. Uncle Lee was a Navy Officer, and they had been ordered back home, to Memphis, or Millington to be exact, where the Navy base was. Since I was supposed to be gone for another month, they were going to sleep in my room, Sarah, who was seven or eight at the time, would stay with Clare, and Peter, a year younger than Sam, would stay with Jay and Sam, since they had two extra bunks.

More cousins, Kristen and Myles, were coming to stay for a little while too. Myles was in the Marine Corps and had been given an ROTC scholarship to get his undergraduate degree and get a commission as an officer. Our house was packed full and brimming with activity.

Sam had a baseball tournament in Cape Giraurdeau, Missouri, near St. Louis, and Jay was dead set on staying home.

"Mom, I don't want to go. I have been to all his games. You are not making Clare go." He pleaded. I know Mom felt horrible, but there was no one else to take care of Jay while she was gone. Mary Francis couldn't help anymore because she had too many responsibilities of her own, and Grandmargie was doing something else for the weekend. It was Thursday night, they were leaving the next afternoon, and Louie and Lee had already arrived.

"Jay, you have to go, there is no one else that take care of you while I am gone."

"Why don't you ask aunt Louie, she could learn to catheterize me?"

"Jay, they just moved from Hawaii and I am not asking her to do that!" By now they were both frustrated with each other and with the situation. Jay rolled off mad and took the elevator upstairs to pout. He approached Aunt Louie, without Mom's permission and frankly asked her,

"Aunt Louie, don't you think you could learn to catheterize me and I could stay home this weekend?" She took it so well, and answered him,

"Well, Jay, yes. I'll try it in the morning and at lunch, and if I can do it I will." Jay yelled down the stairwell to Mom,

"See Mom!" Mom was angry that he had so blatantly disobeyed and put that strain on aunt Louie, but I am sure she was so grateful too, because he wanted to be able to stay home so badly.

The next morning when she was learning to do it, Jay let out a big "Ahhh!" acting like he was in pain. Louie broke into a cold sweat,

"What Jay? What is wrong?"

"Just kidding with ya, aunt Louie," He answered.

So Mom, Dad, and Sam headed up to the baseball tournament in Missouri and Clare stayed at home sweetly to take care of Jay, with Aunt Louie doing the catheterizing. Saturday, Clare and Jay were supposed to go to the St. Jude Golf Tournament, but it was hot and raining, and Jay had just gotten a new wheelchair that weighed about twice as much as his older one, and Clare was having a hard time taking it in and out of our green GMC Yukon, moving Jay in and out of the car seats. She took him over to Grandmargie's house before lunch to catheterize him.

"Jay, you are getting too heavy for me. I don't know how much I can pick you up anymore." She told him as she got him out of the car. He would hold on tightly to our necks when we carried him, trying to shift some of the weight for us, to make it easier. They spent that day together, "Sissy" and Jay, which I have told about elsewhere. She was so proud to be with him. The next day at church, she walked in pushing him. She sat next to him on the side where we always sat as a family; holding the hymnal and singing while everyone else was standing up.

Mom and Dad got home that afternoon with Sam, and I assume he shared the events of the weekend with Jay. Monday morning, Jay was supposed to go to church to help with Vacation Bible School, and he did not really want to go.

"Nobody my age is going," he pleaded.

He ended up going, serving a group of second graders. They talked about the first Christian martyr, Stephen, and how Jesus was standing on his throne when he welcomed Stephen into the Excellent Glory of Heaven, and Jay listened intently. He led the second graders to the main meeting of the day, some of them clinging to his wheelchair, and was glad in the end that he had gone.

That night they all went and looked at conversion vans at the Chevrolet dealership, because ours was old and falling apart. Dad says now he was about to buy one before they went out there that night, but he had no peace about it, and decided in his mind to think it over more. Jay, Sam, Dad, and Myles watched a Braves game. Somewhere during the night, Dad remembered that he had forgotten the Elders meeting at church, the only one before and since that night that he has missed if he was in town.

"Jay, you have a dental appointment tomorrow." Mom told Jay.

"Mom, I can't, I am having lunch with John Martinez." They argued for a short moment, when Dad whispered something into Jay's ear.

"Mom, I would be glad to get my teeth cleaned tomorrow." I imagine it was a comment reminding Jay how much Mom did for us and to be grateful and not talk back to her. When it was time for bed, Jay went upstairs, Dad followed and catheterized him, put him in his favorite t-shirt, the 'Chee-burger Chee-burger' one that Aunt Brenda and Uncle Calvin had brought him from the beach, and prepared the oxygen machine. The

bunk beds make a v-shape into the corner of the room. Peter was in the top right one, Sam in the bottom right, and Jay in his usual spot at the bottom left. Mom said their goodnight prayers with them, holding Peter and Jay's hands and Sam holding on to her leg. She was praying a usual rote prayer and instead of an 'amen' to end it, she said 'we'll talk to you later." They all fell out laughing, she kissed them goodnight, put on his oxygen mask, and turned off the lights.

The Friday afternoon before, I called to talk to Mom and Dad, and Jay answered. I was in a sort of hurry, and he kept talking to me, trying to get me to stay on the phone. My initial thought was to tell him I had to go, and I would talk to him later, but something inside me said that whatever he had to say was more important than what was keeping me busy in the Dominican Republic. We talked for thirty minutes, mostly me listening to his newest stories and telling me all about going back to ECS. I told him about my trip, the family, the fun times Caleb and I were having, (which were always plentiful, no matter how bad of a situation we were in), and whatever else came to both of our minds. On Sunday night, I called again, and I talked with everyone, on speakerphone, all six of us.

It was good that I got to speak with him, that Clare got to have those last times with him at the mall, that Dad missed the Elders meeting, and everyone had sweet last memories.

17. A Sweet Sorrow

The coffee had been brewed downstairs and Aunt Louie and Mom were talking over a cup. Our cousin Peter had woken Sam up around seven to watch cartoons with him, and Peter's sister Sarah was playing with Mary Elizabeth, another of our cousins on Mom's side.

"Mary Elizabeth, will you go wake up Jay, tell him it is about time for me to start getting him ready."

It was all very normal. Dad had left early to go meet with his breakfast group, Clare was spending the night at her friend, Mary Beth's house, and I was still in the Dominican.

Mary Elizabeth came back a minute later and told Mom that Jay wouldn't wake up. Mom started up the stairs starting to get a little frustrated that Sam wasn't ready to go and Jay wouldn't wake up.

"Sam, we have to get ready, Now!"

They walked in and Jay's eyes were slightly open, as usual, but they were bloodshot red. Mom put her hand on his hip and rolled him over, seeing his blue lips.

"Sam! He doesn't look good! Sam! He's dead!" Mom bellowed frantically. "Call Daddy quick." Sam ran into the hall and called the office, and Kevin answered. Taking the phone from Sam, Mom told Kevin,

"Kevin, get Hamp now!"

"Hamp, he's dead, I think he's dead, his lips are blue, he's not breathing..."

"Nancy I'm coming, call 911 right now."

Did we ever really expect this moment to come, especially in the middle of such a normal day in a normal summer? Dad says in that moment when he hung up the phone it hit him that this was a time that he always thought would come, but never really thought or expected that it would. Wasn't he fine the night before, surely he is not dead, just another complication. People always ask me was it expected. No. No, I never expected it. Some doctors might have, some doctors didn't. I always assumed at least adulthood, not so young, not thirteen, not three days before his birthday.

Dad ran out of the office, jumped in his car, and Kevin followed.

Mom called 911, and told Sam to go get Aunt Louie. He ran down the stairs with a bucket of tears rolling down his face,

"Aunt Louie, my Mom needs you right now!" She started to ask him a question,

"Right now Aunt Louie," She knew something was dreadfully wrong. Mom was on the phone with 911, then handed it over to Louie so she could pull him out of bed and start CPR. Tilting his head back, Mom began to breathe down through his mouth, and the air was softly returning out of his nose onto Mom's cheeks.

"Sam, is his chest raising? Is it raising?"

"I don't know Mamma, I don't know!" he yelled through his tears.

The dispatcher told her to start pumping on his chest. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, then breathe again. She never thought she would have to do this on her own son.

"Lord, if he is going to be brain-dead, please don't let him come back," she prayed. Dad was home in about four minutes, and ran into the house and immediately took over the CPR. Sam was sitting in the corner crying and shaking and ringing his hands, screaming inside, "Lord, please don't let him be dead." Dad knew immediately there was no bringing him back, but he tried, and tried, for minutes that bled like hours. He had to try, he knew Sam would never be the same if he thought Dad had given up on him, and Dad helplessly breathed and pushed on Jay's skinny and misshapen little chest, until the paramedics got there.

"I cannot get any air in his chest...I don't know, I don't know," Dad pleaded to the paramedics as they crammed into the blue bedroom. They had him wired up in less than forty-five seconds, and turned on their machines. They looked at his eyelids, Dad was there next to Jay's bed and Mom was across from him.

"Sir, He's gone."

"I know," Dad said crying.

"Can you take these things off of him?"

"Yes, Sir."

They pulled of all the wires and devices, and Dad picked him up gently and held him hard to his breast, weeping heavily, and rocking Jay back and forth on the bed that he last slept in. Sam was sitting next to him, joining him in sorrow, saying over and over, "He's gone, Jay's gone." Sally Klinke was over at our house by this time, Mom called

Aunt Maureen. Standing in the hall, crying over the phone she saw a man who had just come up the stairs. "Sir, I am glad you are here, but who are you?"

He was a doctor who lived on our block and came over to the house when he saw the ambulances. His name was Steve Flannery, and we had not known him before, but because he was there, we were able to keep Jay's body for a while, instead of the paramedics taking him downtown for investigation, which is the usual case when young people die suddenly.

Clare knew she was supposed to pick Jay up sometime before noon to take him to lunch with John Martinez. Mom called over there, but she always called fairly early when we spent the night out. Mary Beth's mom walked up the stairs, and it seemed hesitated to Clare. She handed the phone to Clare, and grabbed Mary Beth out of the room.

"Clare," she waited for a response, "Jay died this morning, he's gone to be with the Lord." She screamed and her heart ripped into a million tiny pieces.

"Clare, get home as soon as you can, the ambulance is here." She grabbed her purse and keys and ran out the door, and hurried home. In the car, speeding through every street and running lights, she was so mad at God.

"Why God? Why not me?"

Dad had carried Jay downstairs and they changed his dirty diaper and catheterized him one last time. They were alone and really did not know what to do. Clare wasn't home yet and it was only Mom, Dad, and Sam with him there on their bed. Dad washed his face with a washcloth, then told him,

"Jay, I'm so glad you couldn't dress yourself. It has been a joy to change your britches all these years, and I am so glad I get to do it one more time." When Clare came

in there were already other people showing up. My best friend in the world, Jonathan Fratesi, was in the kitchen, and his parents were there too. Preston Klinke had joined Sally, the Seabrookes, Uncle Calvin, Grandmargie and Grandchubby, and more people were coming in.

Clare ran back to see him, and fell onto the bed, and held his little hands. Sam looked so scared, so unsure, so broken. Mom and Dad were trying to get in touch with me in the middle of the Caribbean Sea.

The sun was bright like most days there in Santiago, and Caleb and I had gotten up around eight to study for a Spanish tutoring appointment at ten o'clock, I think. I heard the tutyoring lady park her car and stood up with my Spanish books to meet her at the front door, which was right next to our front door. I looked to my right and she was climbing the stairs, then walked out the bedroom door, and the missionary mother was standing right there as if she was just about to knock on the door. Her eyes were filled with tears.

"Drew, your mother is on the phone. Your little brother died last night."

My body went numb, the books fell with a crash to the floor, and I made a noise that felt like a strong iron hand had broken through my sternum and ripped my heart from my chest. I stumbled to their bedroom where the telephone was and picked it howling in my tears,

"No Mom! Why? What happened?" I could barely make any sense. Mom was crying with me and she told me what had happened and that they were going to get me home as soon as they could. Dad got on the phone.

"Dad, get me home."

"Drew, we are..." I didn't let him finish.

"Dad! Please! Get me home now!" I was dying. And I fell into Caleb' arms and sobbed. Then I fell on the ground next to my bed by the sunny window, and lamented to the Lord. I don't know what I said, but I knew Jesus was all I had to trust. But why not me, why couldn't I have died, I thought that immediately and still think it sometimes now.

After a short while, they had a flight lined up for me, and we had a few hours to make it to airport in a nearby city.

Meanwhile, people were still pouring into our house. Dr. Geshke, our faithful family doctor, assured Mom and Dad that there was no reason to get an autopsy, that they wouldn't find anything because it could have been so many different things that made him breathe his last. They trusted him, and Dr. Sanford, through one of his nurses on the phone, reassured them that there was no reason to have an autopsy done.

Sam was sitting next to Jay on the bed, holding one hand, and Clare was holding the other. Everyone gathered into Mom and Dad's bedroom, well over sixty people, crowded but quiet, paying tribute to a lost friend, a dear saint, their little Jaybird. The mix of the crowd was a reflection of Jay's wide love. Grandchubby was standing next to Ronnie and Uncle Calvin. A young Will Klinke stood next to my high school friends, Chris, Brandon, Taylor, and Palmer, who were working construction a few neighborhoods over when Palmer's Dad called them and told them the news. So many others, the Grosharts, the Seabrookes, Uncle Rad and Aunt Maureen, Aunt Louie and Uncle Lee, and a crowd of other worthy faces graced the room. Ronnie, Grandchubby,

and Uncle Calvin prayed, thanking the Lord Jesus for the life He had granted Jay, and the blessing He had granted everyone there for having had the privilege of knowing him. They sang Amazing Grace and a few other old hymns that Jay loved almost as much as Mom. There were fifteen or twenty other people standing outside the bedroom because it wouldn't hold them all.

Sam said he saw our cousin Stephen, who is one of the big and strong athletic cousins, crying; Sam thought to himself, "This is real, my brother is dead."

After the singing, they were going to have to take his body to the funeral home.

"Sir, I'll carry him," the man from the funeral home said.

"No, I have carried him his entire life, and I'll carry him now." Dad picked up his soft, but stiff, little body, with its frogged out legs, bony knees, uni-brow, and curly brown hair that waved in the breeze, and began to carry him out towards the street. The gathering of mourners lined the walkway, and those who couldn't fit stuck their heads out the windows. They made a line, and Dad walked softly, and I cannot help but think of a father sacrificing his son, like Abraham lifting up Isaac, with everyone processing up to take part in the great redemption. I know Dad never wanted to have to walk through that line, but he did it in faith, the same faith that his son lived.

They drove him off in a white suburban. People stayed around and starting taking care of our family, bringing meal after meal, and sitting with us, helping my parents make decisions that come so quickly with the death of a family member. Mamalou and Grandpa were on their way from the Gulf Coast as soon as they heard.

I didn't get home till after eleven that night, after a long day of delusion and uncertainty as to what was going on around me. People were walking through the airport

on their way home from a vacation or a work trip, talking on cell phones, or laughing over a McDonald's quarter pounder with cheese. They didn't know that I was going home because my little brother had died that morning, but I didn't want to tell them. Caleb was loyal and true as always, making me comfortable and letting me cry some and talk more. But mostly we were just quiet as our long day of flying from airport to airport dragged on like a bad movie.

Mom, Dad, Clare, and Sam got pulled over as they stopped the car outside the arrival entrance at the Memphis airport. Speeding thirty miles an hour over the speed limit, Dad told the police officers what had happened that morning, and implored them to give him a ticket if they wanted to but said he couldn't wait because my plane was landing.

I was thrilled to see them, and hugged them tightly. When we drove up at home, around twenty of my friends from school were there, ready to greet me and serve me. I didn't cry when I saw them, I just thanked them for being there. Somehow, Caleb and I began telling stories about our experiences in the Dominican. I love stories, and he is quite the drama king, so we had Clare, Sam, Stephen, Walter, and so many others cracking with laughter.

Yes, we were very sad, but we were also full of sincere joy. Confident that Jay had proceeded in front of us to the most Excellent Glory of being in the presence of his Creator and Savior, we knew that he would want us to keep laughing, to keep smiling, to keep telling jokes and stories, and so it was fitting.

After everyone left, Caleb, Sam, Stephen, Walter and I made our way up to Jay's bedroom, with the two bunk beds in the corner, and the blue walls and wide window. I slept in Jay's bed, and we all lay there for a moment, before we started to hear each other cry. We cried because our brother, our cousin, our comrade was gone, and we cried heartbroken.

18. Going Home

In a world where grief and pain seemed to be kept somewhere in the realm of the personal and private, the way our family and community dealt with Jay's death was atypical. Our house was full for days. As soon as I woke up on Wednesday, the 16th of June, I found people moving to and fro. Mrs. Dickens and Mrs. Fratesi, mom's friends from church, were organizing all the food that people had brought over. Darrin Hillis and Jamie Hill were over getting photographs to make a video to show at the funeral. I cannot really put any of the day's events into order in my mind, because it was such a blur. It does not seem real when you wake up with the weight of the fact that your younger brother died the day before, and you are left here on earth to perform simple tasks like getting dressed or eating a simple breakfast of cereal, all the while remembering your heart is heavy and your soul is burdened by the absence of a loved one, whom you cannot fathom is really gone.

I do remember how Grandmargie, Mom, and I think Aunt Louie were sitting at the dinner table discussing how the funeral would go, and there was a picture of Jay, and I looked at it and burst into tears. They stopped and Mom just rubbed my back as I cried. That is how the day went for everyone. Some folks were busy helping in the kitchen as out of town family arrived, and people who knew Jay and heard about his death stopped by to tell us of their sorrow and tell us to call if we needed anything. Rev. Roy Hendricks,

Andrew's father, helped Mom and Dad out with all the funeral arrangements, and they had to go back and forth between home and Memorial Park Gardens, where the visitation and burial would be.

Someone put a stack of thick manila paper near the front door on a little table, for people who came by our house to write down their thoughts and memories of Jay. Old friends, neighbors, who ever wanted too wrote their memories or their comments on his life or our family:

> "I have great memories of Jay. I could always count on going over to Jay's house ever since I was three when I had nothing else to do. Jay would always call me, and want to go do something. I remember just two days ago he wanted me to go play or go hit some golf balls with him. Jay and I were very close. I will miss him very much, and also loved him very much. I know he is enjoying his great riches in heaven right now. We were also very close, because we were both so crazy about basketball. But I know he's getting the best highlights up in heaven."
>
> -Walter Andrews, 14, cousin and Jay's dear companion

> "He could always make me laugh... He was never mean to me and always had fun with me." -Doug Albright, 10, Sam's friend

> "... His smile, that wide mouth smile. He was a happy child. He loved his siblings, and he loved Hamp and Nancy, who as much as was within their strength and ability created a home where "Life is Beautiful," because Jesus lives, and we know Him, and we can rejoice in his love and sovereignty even in our pain."
>
> -Aunt Leeba Curlin, 50-something, Mom's older sister

"... Growing up over here with y'all has been awesome. Playing guns, then renting Abbot and Costello or some John Wayne movie. The memories were great Jay, you were a trooper beyond belief..." –David Collins, 17, My old friend

"...Jay always had great stories to tell, of which many were hilarious. Jay was a friend to everyone that everyone loved Jay..." -Stephen Andrews, 17, cousin

"In the end, Jay's sweet spirit impressed me most. A sweet resolve that was in fact the outworking of a rock-ribbed muscular faith. A sweet, yielding trust in a Sovereign who promises unconditional love and grants unqualified reward to those who love him. Sure that quality was forged night-in, night-out, day-in, day-out, in a home characterized by uncommon courage and old fashioned, unvarnished gumption. I am better off for having known Jay...and I look forward, with absolute certainty, to the day when I see him again..."

Preston Klinke, 44, Dad's friend, neighbor, and trusted friend to Jay

"I never, ever heard a word of complaint, or self-centred pity. Countless times he watched as my boys loaded bikes to go trail riding, as they swam, as they ran, and as they played ball, yet Jay wouldn't delve into the canyon of pity... When you approached Jay, any infirmity, any wheelchair, any disability disappeared..."

Sally Klinke, 40 something, friend to our family, neighbor

"Jay brought more of God's love to this world than anything or anyone else that I have met in my lifetime. I will never boil or peal another shrimp, among other things, that I will not think of him. Always in our prayers."

Mama Lou and Grandpa, seventy something and eighty something, grandparents.

"Jay and I had many fun times talking secretly about wrestling... I will miss getting those high-fives..." –Ken Edmundson, 46, Dad's friend

"I know your Mom and Dad will read this Jay, but I am going to say it anyway. The time we went out to eat, oh yeah, that time. You were scoping out all the ladies... Jay, you fought the fight and I admire you incredibly for that..."

-Chris Dickens, 16, my friend

"Even though he struggled with English, he was always polite... He'd try to get me off the subject, or suddenly remember someone he had to call or feel a thirst coming on... " Aunt Joni, 40 something, Mom's cousin and Jay's English teacher

"My fondest memories of Jay will be of him with his baseball cap on cheering on the Pendleton Cubs (mine and Sam's team growing up) baseball team. He was our team captain. He would reach over and tap me on the side and say, "Coach T, we kicked their butts, didn't we?" I will surely miss his smile, his jokes, pushing him to the concession stand for a hot dog with no bun. Jay was the toughest kid I knew." –Coach Pete Tashie, 40 something, baseball coach and family friend

People told Jay they missed him, or how impressive it was that he never complained in the midst of such pain and hardship. They wrote about his pennies, or they wrote tributes to my mother's steadfast love or Dad's courage. I felt somewhat distanced from it all, because I had missed everything the day before. I still had not seen Jay's body, and in a terribly way I really wanted to, probably because I couldn't believe it deep down until I saw his still form.

The visitation was going to start at seven, at Memorial Park. When Sam and I were getting our nice clothes on, with starched white shirts and dark ties, we both needed something, either a pair of socks, or some loafers. Like many Sunday mornings before, we ventured down to Dad's closet where we could always find any thing we were missing, or borrow a tie. Dad was sitting on his usual little wooden stool, with the two

racks of clothes hanging on one wall, and a dresser on the other. On one side of him was Sam. I was on the other. We were talking, then I got silent as he was leaning over to pull up one of his socks. He started to weep gently, which overwhelmed Sam and I, and we wept too, and three of us held each other and sobbed. It hurt like a knife in my lungs to think of life without Jay, that he would never roll into that closet and ask Dad to tie his tie or tie his shoes.

After pulling ourselves together to go and face the mass of people at the visitation, we got into our car and drove to the funeral home. When we arrived, we found a line of people all the way out the door, and we wondered who they were coming to see. Grandchubby, Grandmargie, and our family went in a back door to see Jay's body before they started to let people in. I hesitated before I walked to the lonely ten feet through the room towards the casket, but I went, and I looked. There laid the form of my Jay, but he was not there. The soft cheeks and dark eyes and smile were all gone, and so was Jay. I fell into Grandchubby's arms and cried. I realized that I had hoped to see Jay, and I didn't find him, and I would never see him again as I knew him. My blood felt like a river of ice, my eyes were as stones, and my whole being felt empty and void of feeling. Sam watched me break and he died with me there for a moment. The rest of the night I was cold.

People came in by the hundreds, probably the thousands. The line went from Jay's body, down the aisle, out the door, through the main hallway of the funeral home, through more doors, outside, and then wrapped halfway around the building. Some people waited for hours to hug our family, and send their love and regret. In line, Jay's physicians told stories next to his little buddies. Old and young, black and white, poor

and rich, marched slowly through the line. It started around seven, and didn't end till nearly eleven and we were exhausted.

Tribute was paid and Jay would have been proud.

"All those people came to see me?" he would have asked.

After everyone left, our family stayed, and we cried again, because we were exhausted, and we still missed Jay.

Jay was gone and there was no bringing him back. So many questions arose that day in all our minds, but there is one thing we held to, and hold to, with all the faith our mortal frames can muster. We believe in heaven, and we believed in it a long time before Jay died. The hope of Glory, as we call it, is the hope that drives us. When I say us, I mean my family, and many other people who were a part of Jay's life and his passing. It is not a hope based on modern science or psychology or any other human device. It is a hope based on what we believe about how God has revealed himself to us, both through the history of his church and people, and through the revelation of his Son, another broken and afflicted Son, who died and yet lives triumphantly. I do not mean to preach, but to tell the story of Jay, but the honest truth about Jay's life is that at his death, we held strong to the Anchor that we had trusted all along.

We believe heaven is where people who call confidently upon his name can glorify and enjoy him forever. It is the confidence of things eternal upon which we build our faith, upon which Jay built his faith, from childhood. He used to love singing the old hymns. When I was younger, riding in the car with mom, I always told her to put on some "better" music, which meant the radio. But Jay wanted his hymns, and at ten or

eleven or twelve years old is pretty phenomenal. He sang songs like "Great is thy faithfulness", "Amazing Grace" and others.

When we had Jay's funeral, his Home-Going, as we called it, we sang his old hymns, and I am sure he smiled down from heaven.

First Evan was packed. The balcony was completely full, and people were lined up against the windows and in the aisles. The sanctuary holds around two thousand people and there were well over that many there. Mom was nervous that people would be uncomfortable, and in some ways we were excited. We were excited because we knew that it was going to be a special time, where people would tell poignant or funny stories about Jay, we would sing those hymns he loved. Dad was going to speak, and Ronnie was going to give the Eulogy. It was going to be a fitting tribute to Jay, and despite our sadness at losing him, we were glad we could share him one more time with so many.

Right before we were to go down the aisle, I turned around and saw one of my closest friends, John Dallis Ketchum coming in through the doorway. It was one of the most significant moments in my life. He had been in Colorado forty hours before when his mom told him about Jay's death. He got into his car and drove straight back from the Rocky Mountains to Memphis. I had been longing to see him. Dallis was the friend in high school that held my attention with his every word, and knew my deepest sufferings and joys, and I had longed to weep on his shoulder. In that moment, I grabbed him and hugged him as we both shed soft tears, and I realized much about love, loyalty, and true friendship, a friendship we had seen in each other, and one we both felt for Jay.

Sam, Stephen, Caleb, Walter, Chuck, Cobb, the other male cousins, and myself followed his casket down the aisle. All of his young friends, accompanied by their fathers, were honorary pallbearers, and they followed us in and sat opposite the family. After an opening hymn, a welcome, and a prayer, Darrin Hillis and I played "All in All" on the guitar and everyone sang. It was one of Jay's favorite praise songs in the youth group. Taylor Park, who is a big man with a thick beard, and a close friend of my parents, followed and told everyone that we were gathering to celebrate, not to mourn, that it would be a service of joy mingled with sorrow.

Uncle Steve shared about Jay's birth and how he had been so angry with God and had cried out to him the prayer that asked God to give Jay speech and an abundant life. He said he would miss that tug on his pant leg, and many in the crowd laughed, having known Jay's tug on their own pant leg or jacket sleeve.

John Martinez shared his longstanding friendship with Jay, doing the finest imitation of his squeaky voice, saying "Awesome" or "Man!" or how Jay would call him all the time, asking him the same questions more than once.

"Now, Jesus, I know you already told me this. I know you already told me this, but when is my family coming," John acted a conversation between Jay and his Lord in heaven, "When is Sam coming, and Drew. When is Clare coming? Because, Jesus, this place is awesome, and, and...I know I already asked you this, but when are Mom and Dad coming?"

John said he thought singing was what Jay wanted to do the most in heaven, not run, or jump, but sing with his hands up and his head back. He would sing because his paralyzed vocal cords wouldn't allow that here on this earth. He introduced the video that

Jamie Hill and Darrin had produced, which showed pictures of Jay from birth to the day before he died, in Memphis and in Colorado, with Mom or Dad or friends or cousins, and every eye in the room was filled with sweet tears.

It was fitting that after the video, there was an open microphone and people began to share their thoughts. Boys and Girls came, Mothers and Fathers, Sunday School Teachers and family friends, all to tell their Jay stories. My friend Dustin Hall talked about making popcorn and getting High-fives. Alan Blanton, dad's friend from high school to adulthood, shared of being at the hospital at Jay's birth, and the relationship spawned there and how they used to say, "I love you, Man," like the Bud Light commercial did. Another of Dad's friends talked about Jay's death as being precious, valuable for life and love and growing up in a tough world. Some people read poetry. Others read scripture. Ron Man, our music director at First Evan, told the story about Jay meeting Itzak Perlman. Stan Wells rehearsed the late night phone calls and the trip to the donut shop.

Grandchubby divulged the story of the time he read the Velveteen Rabbit. I told the crowd that Jay was my hero, and I wanted to have confidence of life that he had. Sam characterized Jay as a fighter, who fought well. Clare said she would miss his big hands and soft cheeks.

In a fitting ending to everyone sharing Jay, Dad embraced the podium, telling the people what he, as Jay's father, remembered. He talked about Jay being a bit off-color, outside the lines. He said he never wanted to sit in the same seat again, that that seat meant the death of a child or a spouse, and his eyes choked with tears. Dad had two sets of paper he was reading from, the first was his list of things to say and people to thank.

The other paper was a list of anecdotes and stories to tell when the weight of it all was too much and he couldn't continue with the first papers.

Dad said he was making Jay's acceptance speech, since Jay couldn't make it himself. He thanked all the physicians who had kept Jay alive and well for the time we had him, especially Dr.s' Geskhe and Sanford, who really looked out for Jay's well-being. He thanked nurses, physical therapists, teachers, and administrators by name. Dr. Binkley, Pete Tashie, Mr. Mahoney, and Robbie for "coaching" him. He thanked all the men and women at the church who made Jay feel loved and welcomed. He thanked Jay's friends, Kenny, Andrew, John Mark, Robert, Scott, Rod, and of course Walter and the other cousins. He told funny stories too, and everyone there who knew Jay fell out laughing, knowing exactly how the scenes would have been as Dad painted them. He talked of the irony of this world seeing success as being a major philanthropist or a great athlete or a wealthy businessman.

"Jay had no job, $400 to his name, never played on a sports team, never had a girlfriend, and had a narly looking body, and yet..." then Dad pointed or motioned toward the audience. Despite Jay's failures at what the world deems success, he had gone out triumphantly, being celebrated and mourned by many.

"I'm exhausted, but I couldn't have had a better time." He told Clare, Sam, and me how proud of us he was, and then he couldn't even address Mom without breaking down. He ended, through shaking tears, when he told everyone, "Jay was one heck of a kid... I am honored to pick up his prize." The crowd arose in a standing ovation, homage both to Mom and Dad as parents, and Jay as a friend, and son.

Dad was so vulnerable to share his broken soul with everyone in that packed room, on a hot June Memphis Day. I know he was proud too, the good kind of proud. He was proud that Jay was his son, proud that so many people had been moved or touched or entertained or encouraged by his son Jay, who was so much like him.

The home-going had lasted almost three hours by this point, but it seemed like only twenty minutes, and the mass of people there were relishing every second.

For almost three years afterwards, I kept a folded up, stapled, four page manuscript in the corner of my wallet. It was the manuscript of the Eulogy preached at Jay's Funeral. Ronnie Stevens preached Jay's Eulogy, right after Dad spoke. In it, he addressed Clare, Me, and Sam, and anybody else younger who were Jay's peers. I wont tell of its contents, for they speak for themselves, but I will say that I carried it in my pocket, because I saw it as a powerful and truthful account of the way I felt, and still feel, about the realities of Jay's life and death, and the implications those realities on the way I view the world and the coexisting goodness and suffering in it. Here it is, in the form that I read it in, over and over again.

Although I hope everyone will eavesdrop, I want to address my remarks to Clare, and Drew, and Sam, and their cousins, and Jay's friends in his generation. But, especially, to his sister and brothers. You may wonder why I don't want to say anything to your parents or your grandparents since I'm their pastor. I *do* want to say something, but I'm not qualified. I can't really speak to them at a time like this any more than I could speak to Michael Jordan about basketball. I can't speak to them because they know much better than I.

I have a hard time comforting them for the same reason John the Baptist had a hard time baptizing Jesus. "Why are you coming to me to be baptized?" he asked. "You ought to be baptizing me."

You see your parents have been enrolled in one of God's most important graduate courses for the last 14 years. I'll tell you the name of the course later. I'm positive they've made a 4.0. They'd never mark themselves that high, but they're not doing the grading. On Tuesday morning they graduated *summa cum laude*. I've read the catalogue of God's courses, and I can talk about the courses described, but I've never taken the course they've finished. They're already in another course, but we seldom know what it's about until it's over. So that's why I'm not going to speak to them. But I do want to speak to you.

God willing, Clare will go to university in the Fall and Drew will follow a year later. Sam, you have a bit to wait, but unless Jesus comes for us soon your time will come as well. When you all leave, the truths which were pressed upon you at home won't seem as important anymore. Really, they'll

be more important. But when the world crowds in, they will appear to be less so. And the Gospel which sounded so convincing in the mouth of Granny or Grand Chubby, or your Mom and Dad, will be drowned out on some days -- drowned out by the philosophies of the world, the demands of the flesh and the arguments of the devil.

Those philosophies and arguments will sound something like this. God isn't there. And if He is there, He doesn't matter. And if He does matter, He deserves our contempt, not our worship. He deserves our contempt because He made the world so badly. He allowed so much suffering. So much death. So much pain. And, really, He ought to ask *our* forgiveness. We certainly don't need His forgiveness. The answer to these arguments is found in the wisdom of God. Something the world doesn't know and the devil won't tell you.

And the wisdom of God means that He knows something about the beginning of the world which we don't know. He knows something about possibilities and liberties which were forfeited by your first parents - whose names are not Hamp and Nancy, but Adam and Eve - because they chose to believe lies. Because they made that choice - a choice which was important for God to give them - sometimes we are born with handicaps. And sometimes we die young.

The world will ask you why God didn't make a world where there would be no suffering or death. The answer is He did make a world like that. It's the world your brother lives in now. It's the world called Heaven. But those who don't believe in God are angry because they demand something of God

they would never dream of demanding of anyone else. They demand to enter His world on their own terms, and without His permission. We can only get into God's Heaven in the way He prescribes - not in the way we demand.

God's wisdom also means that He knows something about the *end* of the world we don't know. He knows how the story will end. And He knows how He will make all things right. And then when He makes all things right, and He shows us what He knows, we'll be able to see and feel something we now only take by faith. And sometimes we can't feel it at all because we're hurting so much. One day we'll be able to say, "Your plan was really best all along. And now we see why." That day came for Jay on Tuesday morning. This little in-between time where we live, this little time between our creationand our entrance into Heaven, is a time when God mostly answers thequestion "who?" He seldom answers the question "why?" To that question, He says "Trust me and wait."

But the *wisdom* of God is not the only answer to the lies you'll hear. The *love* of God is also the answer, and in some ways it's a more important answer. When the world accuses God for its suffering, God doesn't answer with an argument. He answers with a spectacle. He doesn't plead; He points. Hepoints to a hill outside Jerusalem, the hill the Jews called Golgotha and the Romans called Calvary. God says, "You see, I've taken suffering myself, and I've suffered in a way you can never understand." And God says whatever you may guess about your own suffering, I want you to know about my suffering too, and the suffering of my Son. And I want you to know your suffering does not mean I do not love you. And I want you to

know that my suffering means that I love you more than you have ever loved anyone else and more than you've been loved by anyone else.

It's important you understand the true name of the course your parents just completed. The world calls it suffering and pain, and heartache and trial. God calls it all those things too, but He calls it something else as well. He calls it a funny theological word called sanctification. And all sanctification means is the way God makes us like Himself.

That process for your Mom and Dad has a lot to do with your brother's life and death. When your Mom and Dad looked down on Jay's still form Tuesday morning, in a terrible, but necessary, way, they stood in the place God stood over Calvary. Before your parents had children, if you'd asked them would an afflicted child who suffered and couldn't take care of himself and who died young be a cross, be a burden, they would have said oh, yes, that would be a cross and a burden we don't think we could bear. But ask them now. Ask yourselves now.

Don't you get a little mad if someone thinks of Jay as a cross or a burden? Doesn't that offend you a little? Isn't it really a kind of blasphemy to think of his life as a burden? Do you see what's happened? Do you see what always happens when we thank God, and trust God, when something goes terribly wrong? When something happens that we didn't want to happen? When He gives us an assignment we don't remember signing up for? An assignment like having a child or a brother who's miserably afflicted? Do you see how God can turn it into something wonderful? You see how, even though it was hard, it became something that you're so glad God gave you.

Something that you even want back. Something that you don't even know how you can live without.

Remember when the world tells you lies about God that Adam and Eve believed lies about God. They believed God misled them. And remember that Adam and Eve had advantages that you and I don't have. They had actually seen God and heard His audible voice. Also, they had no sin nature. They hadn't fallen yet. But when Satan tries to drown out the Gospel, remember that you have advantages Adam and Eve did not have. You have a mother and father who not only tell you the truth, but model the truth. And you know things about Jesus and His cross, and His resurrection, which Adam and Eve did not know.

But you have something else. And you have something else now you did not have before Tuesday morning. Before Tuesday morning you had a brother who rooted for you, who pulled for you, who cheered for you with all his heart, who was always on your side, who was always your biggest fan. He did so from a place of suffering, from a place of weakness and frustration and restriction, which you could not imagine. But now when you resist the arguments of the world, and you stand for the things that really count, you still have a brother who's rooting for you, who's cheering for you, who's your biggest fan. He does so from a position of power and liberty and joy, which you cannot imagine. He was always sitting, looking up at you. Now he's soaring, looking down at you. From where we stand today, we can only see ironies. We see the irony that tomorrow is Jay's birthday. And Sunday Father's Day. But from where he soars, he can see something

else. And not only see it, but feel it. And not only feel it, but be filled with it. That thing is called Glory.

May you hold fast your confession. When the world insists that suffering means that we must judge God and find Him absent or guilty, may you glare, and may you declare that there is one God who made Heaven and earth and Jesus of Nazareth is His Son and there is no other name given under Heaven whereby men might be saved. And He is worthy of more trust than our puny faith can muster and more praise than our mortal frames can sustain during the short lease God grants us on this planet. And when *your* lease is up, may you share that Glory with Jay on the day your Heavenly Father chooses. May you always say what your Mom and Dad have said. May you say, "This is our God. May He do with us what seemeth Him well. We will trust Him both now and in the day of our death. Someone has held." Glory, Glory, Glory Hallelujah. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

And to those of you who have believed those lies, either secretly or openly, I end by saying this:

All o'er those wide extended plains
Shines one eternal day
There God the Son forever reigns
And scatters night away
We are bound for the Promised Land
We are bound for the Promised Land
O who will come and go with us
We are bound for Jay Holcomb's land.

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Epilogue

Here, after I finish all the writing, I will look back, in the format of a fictional conversation with Jay, in the here and now. I will tell him all about the project, about what has been going on in the last four years, the things done in his name and in his honor. We will talk about old times, we will talk about our family, we will talk about this work, and I will tell him all the things I have wanted to for four years, this could be a very powerful and effective ending.