

## Life Redefined

October 19, 2009

### MESSAGE Pt. 1

Somewhere along the line I heard a quote, or a song lyric or something...not really sure what that said something to the effect of this house doesn't make a home. Even if the source of that quote isn't clear, I believe the sentiment is...it is not the stuff we collect that makes a home...it's the warmth, the relationships...in short the people who live in the house that make it a home. That is why...when we lose someone we love, the idea of home can be so elusive.

While in our heads we know building a clock that runs backwards really isn't going to bring our loved one back, yet in our hearts we still yearn to recover that lost sense of home. Recently I was having a conversation with my friend Jerry Toomer about loss...we were both reminiscing about folks we have loved and lost. Something he said struck me as very profound...He said that the loss he suffered was out of order...that is to say, it was a son he had lost. Parents aren't supposed to lose their children...it's just not supposed to work that way.

That conversation reminded me very vividly of a former student of mine who was tragically killed by a drunk driver down at IU. Ashley Crouse was killed on April 5th, 2005. When I last saw her, she had stopped by my room to say goodbye the last day of school. She was a great student, a student leader, a soccer player...a volunteer for kids with disabilities...just a great kid, and that's the memory print she left behind for me.

So...It's exceedingly difficult to describe shock I felt when I heard the news. No...SHE couldn't be gone...there was denial...no, no, not HER there must be some mistake. There was anger when reality set in...she was killed how?! That's not fair, she had her entire life ahead of her...she has so much to give...and just in an instant it was all gone.

When I began processing her death days, weeks...months afterwards one of the things that drove me absolutely insane was the randomness of the whole thing. How and why

was she in that terribly wrong place at that split second?

### MESSAGE Pt. 2

You see, I think Sheryl Crow really captures the essence of love and loss...she says what many of us feel... *You let somebody in they might fade away*. Ultimately though, to love, and to fully experience love, we have to make ourselves vulnerable. We have to choose to love a finite being...and that very thing produces the greatest conundrum...how do we fully invest our whole being into someone we know we will lose?

Again, Sheryl Crow seems to know the secret... *I know why the heart gets lonely*...Every time you give your love away. I believe because we really don't have a choice...each of us chooses to give our love away. We give it in all of our relationships...but it seems the particularly tough ones are the ones like Ashley Crouse...or like Jerry said, the ones that are out of order .

No matter the loss...whether it is a tragic loss, a loss we may have had time to prepare for...a young person, or your 93-year-old grandmother who lived a full life...loss is loss and it is painful. Here is the thing though...and to borrow song lyrics again... *It's the one thing that I've felt I've always known*...They say love keeps on growing. And I do believe that fully...I believe those we have loved and lost have given us a love that keeps on growing in us...even after they are physically gone...

### MESSAGE Pt. 3:

Recently I was having a conversation with some folks about the idea of reconciliation. I think often we hear reconcile and think about maybe settling an argument...and it usually implies forgiving and forgetting so you can move forward. However, I like to focus on the positive connotation of reconcile. I like to think about reconciliation as a new way of being.

In this way, we are not forgetting the past...actually quite the opposite we seek to openly remember the past and allow it to richly shape who we are. It is because of the life prior to the words "he died, or she died" that we are...

When Ashley Crouse died...of course I was sad because she had died, but I was very sad her life prior to those words were cut short...out of order. However, in reconciling her loss in my own mind, what has emerged is the idea that she is alive...still, but just in a different way.

As we connect and reconnect with all of these images, it is my prayer that each of us find a way to connect with the living legacy of those we have loved and lost. AMEN

At the time of her death, Ashley was involved in student leadership at IU...and to this day she still is. Friends of Ashley's from Carmel have partnered with the IU Dance Marathon to create one of the most successful high school dance marathons in the country. This year they raised almost \$160,000 in her memory for children at Riley Hospital. That does not bring her back to us physically...but it does keep her memory alive and allows us to experience her presence.

And that brings me back to my conversation with Jerry Toomer. Jerry is a member of a group that he and all the other members frankly would rather not be in...Jerry is part of group of dads who meet for coffee every Tuesday morning. The common denominator for all the dads is that they all have lost a son or daughter.

In talking with Jerry, one way he found that many of the dads were keeping the memory of their sons or daughters alive was by writing. So, 16 of them came together to write a book, Tuesday Mornings with Dads. (photo book\_cover) For this group of dads, it has become the way the ones they have lost continue to be a living legacy for them and others.

Jerry and I actually made a short film of our conversation which I'd like to share a little bit with you now. If you'd like to see the entire piece, please visit The Garden website (photo garden\_home)...a link to it is on the homepage. Also, after the service, if you are a dad who has experienced this kind of loss, or know someone, Jim Shroeder is available to talk with you...let's take a look at the film.

CLOSE:

Jay Feely is the place-kicker for the New York Jets who I follow on Twitter on September 29th he made this post:

*Sept. 29, @jayfeely: My brother lived 26 years as a severely disabled child and though he could never communicate his legacy left a lasting image on so many.*