

REMEMBERING OWEN
By Bill Strong January 18, 2020

Good morning.

I'm Bill Strong, Ed's brother. With me is my daughter, Cecily, one of four first cousins to Owen and Leda from the Chicago wing of the family.

The Chicago cousins are all present and accounted for: In addition to Cecily, there's Nate, Steve, and Samantha.

My wife Colleen joins us, as does Steve's wife, Sarah.

And speaking of cousins - a shout-out to our four Sibert cousins from the North Carolina wing of the family, all here with wives and children.

Like you, we are here to express abiding love for our precious, golden soul Owen ... and in the face of such hurt, remember and celebrate his life.

And in whatever measure may be possible ... provide solace to Ed, Laurel, Leda, and Stacia.

Owen Strong: Such an abundantly talented, creative, brilliant, energetic, charismatic, fun, and yes, a mischievous young man.

In remembering Owen, our conversations always turn to his basic goodness, decency, and humility ... his genuine affection for others ... and the attention that he paid to our stories.

And as we have heard so frequently in the letters and condolences that have poured in over the past week - his caring ... love ... kindness ... and empathy.

Talk about qualities we so desperately need in the world!

I recently exchanged emails with Tad Roach, Head of School at St. Andrew's, which Owen and Leda attended ... as did their father and I a few decades earlier.

Tad lamented that in Owen's passing, we lost what he so aptly described as "a precious and very needed citizen of the world."

It's so hard today to get past the question:

"WHY OWEN ... AND WHY NOW?"

It reminds me of a lyric by one of my favorite singer-songwriters ... Lucinda Williams. In her song, "Joy," she practically growls the line: "YOU TOOK MY JOY / I WANT IT BACK"

Different context... but a similar feeling of loss and displacement.

"Why Owen ... and Why Now?"

I don't even know where to direct that question.

Maybe we just have to figure it out for ourselves.

Maybe all we can do ... as we try to process that question "why" at this time of searing grief ... is to hold tight onto the enduring qualities that keep Owen alive in our hearts.

I suspect that for many of us, one of the qualities at the top of that long list would be Owen's inspiring optimism and resolve over the past two years. With his grace and good humor, he fought the good fight, setting an example for us all.

Jay Tolson shared the story about the little boy with the cast on his arm who, despite his injury, was the happiest kid in the swimming pool.

Fast forward 25 years, when a young man shares with his father that he's happier than he's ever been ... having found true love with the beautiful angel, Stacia.

The happiest time of his life ... and he's got brain cancer.

That's Owen: "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead."

Owen had so many gifts. How characteristic that he would leave them with us.

Perhaps in remembering a life lived with such grace and generosity of spirit, we can at least begin to wrestle with the hard questions whose answers elude us today.
