

Leda Strong
January 18, 2020

Anyone who knows me, especially Owen, will be unsurprised when I talk about UNC athletics and Harry Potter today. I knew I had no chance at sounding as eloquent as the other speakers (I begged not to follow Cecily and Sasha) so that's what I've got. The late Stuart Scott, a former UNC athlete and ESPN sportscaster, had the following to say about his battle with cancer: "When you die, it does not mean that you lose to cancer. You beat cancer by how you live, why you live, and the manner in which you live." Of course, Owen embodied those ideals perfectly, and in fact set an example for how to live long before his diagnosis.

I thought a lot about the stories I could share from the past 30 years illuminating who Owen was, but that felt a bit overwhelming, since Owen was the best this world had to offer and because, again, I knew these stories would be covered with much more grace and charm earlier in the service. Instead, I wanted to share the story of Owen's final day with us, since it so entirely captures his spirit, and because it has brought me some small comfort that I hope to share with you.

I hardly left his side that day, and promised him I would be there, ready to help with anything and to fulfill any need. At one point, he uttered my name. "Leda," he said. "Yes?" I asked, at the ready for any request. "What was the name of the tool that Dumbledore used to put out all the street lights?" He and Stacia had been listening to the *Harry Potter* audiobooks for the past few months, an activity that brought him great comfort, and that he tended to use for such trivia purposes to keep his memory and cognitive function sharp, which was important to him. He didn't want us to worry. And if you don't know the answer to his question, I hope you return home today and read or re-read the *Sorcerer's Stone*, which I can assure you Owen would want you to do.

One of the rare times I did leave his side that day was when his brilliant and extraordinary doctor Adrienne Boire cleared the room to speak with Owen privately. She gathered the rest of us afterward, and told us the worst news anyone could ever give a family with utmost poise. She asked if we had questions, and I had just one: I asked if he was scared. Without hesitation or an ounce of artificial politeness, she said "no." She said that when she gives most patients the news she gave Owen, they understandably bargain—they ask if she's tried this, or what if they do that? But not Owen. He told Dr. Boire: "thank you. I know you did your best." I mean, who does that? When we re-entered his room, his message for us was not much different. "Thank you for being here," he told us. What he said next was so profound, so perfectly Owen, and something I know he wishes he could have said to all of you: "I love you so so so much."

A lover, a fighter, and a competitor to the end, Owen gave three perfect answers to my next three Harry Potter trivia questions. What is the name of Harry's father (James,) what is the name he used as a Marauder (Prongs,) and what is the special power that protects Harry from Voldemort (love). Please excuse the clumsy analogy between glioblastoma and Voldemort, but I don't think Owen would mind. It was this same special power that enabled Owen, as Stuart Scott described, to live in a manner that never let glioblastoma win.

Owen: one day, we will be together again, bobbing in the waves off Gibbs Beach, our laughter carrying back to the shore as we wave to Mom and Dad on the sand. I love you so so so so much.