

# Chapter 5 – The Pain Train

In November 2014 my friends and I got together to, what else, watch sports. We did not play cards though. Even though we had enough guys to play, we just wanted to watch sports and gobble down some pizza that evening. It was a good time. When we get together we rarely watch a single game for more than a few minutes. Channel changing from game to game is usually the order of the day. The guys like to bet on games and do fantasy leagues and stuff, so you can't just sit and watch one game! And, of course, in this day and age, we, like everyone else, constantly had our faces in our cell phones checking on scores and statistics. It was so good to see my friend Brian drinking beer and eating pizza and just enjoying the moment.

With Dad and Brian recovering nicely from their surgeries, I was really looking forward to the holidays. Unfortunately, things did not go so well. It all started when I went to a political meeting on a very cold night (I'll talk more about this later). The building was cold when I got there, and anytime I am in a cold building for too long my body doesn't like it and I often get a cold or sinus infection. I shook the hand of the meeting organizer and he mentioned my hands were really cold. Yep, I knew it was coming, and sure enough, it did. As I was driving home from the meeting I started getting stuffed sinuses and a tickle in my throat. Just in time for Thanksgiving, I had a nasty sinus infection. So, instead of being with my family and gorging myself on delicious turkey, potatoes, salads, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie, I was at home with my towel-wrapped head hovering over a vaporizer. Fabulous! At least I was able to watch some football. Lucky for me my family was kind enough to bring me some leftovers, which I ate over the next three or four days. So while I didn't have the family time, at least I got the food portion of the holiday. Unfortunately, due to my cold and sinus infection, I really couldn't taste much of anything!

A few weeks went by consisting of cold weather, snow plowing, listening to Christmas music, recovering from my sinus infection and watching Whitey bounce around the yard. Then, on December 15, just ten days before Christmas, which I was *really* looking forward to since I missed Thanksgiving, I got another horrible email from my friend Brian. His cancer had returned and it was looking like he was going to need major surgery to reroute things and get rid of the cancer, which was obstructing his bowels. I just couldn't believe it. It was almost this exact same time a year ago that we got notified about his cancer, which put a damper on the holidays, and now the same thing was happening again. Once again I felt so bad for Brian and his family and prayed. Two days later, the final dagger came. He told us his cancer was terminal, that the doctors could no longer help him and that he was going home to hospice care. He was told he had about a month left here on Earth.

My heart just completely sank and tears started rolling down my eyes once again.

All of my friends started commenting and sending messages on Facebook and Caring Bridge. I was hearing from some friends I haven't seen in many years. We were all just so sad and devastated. I could not believe this was happening. I was just stupefied, numb, in disbelief. As before, I took perspective on things. Over the last couple years I had lost my job and lost my driver's license due to the DWI, but now my friend was about to lose his life.

With time running out for Brian, we made sure to go visit him at his house. Our beloved Minnesota Golden Gophers football team had finally, for the first time in our lives, made it to a New Year's Day

bowl game. But it was surely a bittersweet moment. We had waited for our entire lives to see this, and it finally happens, and instead of cheering and celebrating, there we were, sitting in Brian's living room, watching the game knowing this was going to be the last Gopher football game he would ever watch. The discord between feelings of joy and feelings of pain ran through me the entire afternoon. It's pretty hard to give a darn about your team scoring a touchdown or making a great play when, sitting across the room is your friend, slowly losing his Earthly existence. Still, Brian did what he loved, and put money on the game. When somebody scored to ensure that he would win his bet, he yelled and said "Yes, \$50!!!" I was just in utter disbelief that here he was dying and was cheering that he just won \$50. But I suppose when you are dying you do whatever you can to enjoy your last days and not think about, you know, eternity.

When I came over on New Year's Day I brought a little gift bag for Brian and his family. One of the things in that gift bag was a book called Heaven Is For Real. I had heard about it and actually saw it lying on the table at the nursing home my Dad was staying in while recovering from his surgery. I eventually picked it up and started reading it and also saw the movie, and I figured now that Brian was preparing to go to heaven, it would be a good book for him to read. Although he didn't read it, his wife read the whole thing and she said they talked about it, but didn't really tell me what they talked about specifically or how it affected him. She said it was a nice gift though and it would help them get through this very difficult time. I was glad my gift was helpful.

A couple days later a different group of friends stopped by to visit and watch more football. This group was made up of more college friends, while the other group that came over for the Gopher game was more made up of friends from after college. So while we watched football that second day, there was a lot of reminiscing about our good old college days and all the experiences we had. Once again it was a nice time, but Brian had turned noticeably worse over just the previous two days. From the time he was told his cancer had returned, he was no longer able to eat anything. All he could have was water and orange juice, so he was getting noticeably thinner. His skin was also turning yellowish. It was so hard to see. However, while I saw him looking just terrible when sitting on the couch when we arrived, as soon as we walked into the living room he perked up, a smile broke out and he was just overjoyed to see us. That look of death kind of dissipated as we sat down and started talking. Then, after a fairly enjoyable afternoon of watching football, telling stories and munching on meatballs, the toughest moment came.

My friend Amy had flown in from Milwaukee to see Brian one last time. She didn't plan on going to the funeral so she came for this day instead, figuring it would be better to see him alive one last time. So when it came time for us to say goodbye, it wasn't necessarily the last time I would see him, but it was the last time for her. So when Amy and Brian hugged, they told each other they loved each other. I, on the other hand, foolishly just kind of gave him a firm handshake and bro hug and told him to email me about watching football the next weekend. However, after everyone hugged Brian, I too went back to give him a big hug. I did not think it was the last time I would see him, so I didn't tell him I loved him, but I suddenly felt the bro hug wasn't enough. I had written a letter to him, on the request of his sister, in which I told him I loved him like a brother, but I didn't say it in person. That was one of the biggest mistakes of my life, and I will always regret not telling him in person. After we left the house we were all in tears. We climbed into my friend's SUV and headed out for food and drinks. It was a nice time, but the fact that we had to leave Brian behind really sucked.

A few more days went by and I was waiting to hear from Brian about possibly getting together to watch the NFL playoffs. I didn't hear anything so asked him how he was doing. He said he wasn't feeling well the last few days and told me he'd get back to me about football. A couple days later we got another

email stating that Brian was back in the hospital due to uncontrollable vomiting. I prayed again, knowing this might be the end. That was Saturday night.

Early the next day, on January 11, 2015, a Sunday morning, I checked Facebook and I saw I had a message, and I knew, I just knew. I opened the message and it said Brian had gone to heaven. And I said to myself, "He died."

I guess it was because I was well aware what would ultimately happen, that when I got the message I did not cry, at least not at first. My mind just wandered, as I started thinking about where Brian was. Was he in heaven? What's heaven like? Does heaven exist? Or when we die is it just, as someone once said, lights out? I wondered and wondered and pontificated and wondered...and then went back to sleep for a little while. I did not know what to think or how to react to the news that my friend had just left Earth, and that I would never see him again, would never hear his laugh again, would never see his smile again, would never play cards with him again, would never hear him rooting for sports teams again and would never go to Vegas with him again. He was gone. I was crushed. A few hours later my sister called and asked me how Brian was doing. I told her he's a lot better now. She wondered what I meant. I told her he's in heaven now, no more pain. He's a lot better now. She told me she was so sorry to hear it and offered her love and support.

A few days of chatting on Facebook with friends and getting funeral details went by, and then it was time for the wake and the funeral, or, as it is called when someone is cremated, the Celebration of Life ceremony. I was rather taken aback by hearing that Brian was cremated, because it prevents you from being able to pay your last respects in front of the casket, like I am usually able to do at funerals. So the last time I saw Brian was at his house, when we were talking about watching football the next week. I did not know that would be the last time I would see him, but if it was I was certainly hoping to pray in front of his body at the wake or funeral. I didn't get that chance either. I missed out twice.

At the wake, I saw a few of my friends (the rest came to the funeral), but one person was there in particular that stood out. Chris, the brother of my friend Steve who died in 1997, was there, but he also became friends with us, Steve's friends, after his brother died. However, his mother was also there. She was there to pay respects and give comfort to her son who just lost one of his friends. That was so incredibly nice of her to be there for support. She said that Steve and Brian must be having a great reunion in heaven. I'll never forget that statement. After the wake came the funeral, and seeing all my friends in tears was really tough, as it is for anyone. The ceremony was very nice, but I saw something I have never seen at a funeral before. When the priest started talking about Brian's last moments, he started to weep. He mentioned how, in the final moments, he asked Brian if he was ready to go to heaven, and he said he was. That made me and a lot of other people tear up too. I couldn't imagine what such a moment would be like, having a priest ask you if you were ready to meet God. My mind wandered again. I didn't even notice Brian's ashes were at the front of the church until after the ceremony. As we walked out I briefly touched the urn and said my final goodbye, still not fully comprehending that he was gone forever.

After the ceremony we met in the church basement for some socializing, then later we spent the night at another friend's house for good old fashioned sports watching and playing cards and, of course, the obligatory boxes of pizza. It was surreal as we played cards and talked about Brian and his final days and what he knew, what he didn't know, and just continuing to play as tears rolled down everyone's cheeks. Check, bet, raise, tears, bet, raise, tears. It was just unreal. A song came on the stereo that reminded one of the guys of Brian, and we started to cry again. We had thought about going to the casino, but

honestly, I don't think anyone was in the right frame of mind to be sitting in public at a table with strangers. I know I wasn't. So we stayed at the house and just enjoyed the night as best we could, sharing stories about Brian throughout the evening.

I want to mention one thing that stood out was the fact that, from the time he was diagnosed with cancer until he took his last breath, Brian never once complained about how much pain he was in. He would tell us what was happening and what he was going through, but he never once mentioned the pain. That was just astounding to me. He was strong until the very end. I will tell you, I will do a lot less complaining going forth, especially about the petty things in life. Honestly, that has already helped me get through some situations better than I otherwise would have.

I soooo wish I could end this chapter here, but sadly, there was more pain to come. You see, at that get together for food and drinks after we left Brian's house, one of my friend's wife told everyone she had lost her mother a few months prior. We were sad to hear that. My sister's neighbor also died in late 2014. In addition, a few weeks after Brian died my other sister told me one of her friends she met at their cabin had died. At about that same time, my sister's husband found out his former boss had died. Not long after that, my mother notified me that their next door neighbor, whom they had known for almost 40 years, had passed away. A few days later my mother had another funeral notice, this time it was for a friend of theirs who lived up by their cabin. Around that same time another friend of mine posted messages on Facebook about how his mother was ailing, and she eventually died too. So in the span of just a few weeks, several people that either I knew or someone close to me knew had died. It was just unbelievable. Every few days was another funeral email. It was almost as if there was this giant party going on in heaven and everyone was rushing to get there. I almost felt like I was being left out. Seriously. It was like I wasn't invited to the party. As I was getting all these emails, I started to say "the pain train rolls on."

All of these other deaths came at a time when I was trying to recover from Brian's death and get back to the job search and skill building. I had about two months left to finish a mammoth 11-course training program to learn SAS, a computer program used for database management and statistical analysis and modeling. It was not easy stuff. I looked at the courses I had left and realized I could finish the program, but it would require studying at least 8 hours every day, including the weekends, for the next two months straight. So I bared down and got right to it. Unfortunately, diving right back into my training program kind of cut short my mourning period. I felt that I needed to get this training done, but I was also still mourning. It was very difficult to concentrate at first. How do you try to learn computer code when you are still wondering where your friend's soul went, or what happens when people die? My brain was just overloaded with thoughts and questions of every kind. A few weeks went by and I was gradually getting back into computer training mode, in the midst of all the death emails.

It's really too bad, though, that the pain train just kept rolling even after January was past. A few weeks after the train seemed to come to a halt, I got an email from my mother. Her sister was not doing well and it was looking like it could be the end soon. She had battled many ailments most of her life and there were several times before that seemed like it could be the end for her. But this time was different. According to my mother, the last few times my aunt thought she was close to death, she kept fighting, she did not want to die. This time, however, she said she was ready. She called the family to come to her bedside, and on February 24, 2015, my aunt passed away. It was a very difficult time for my mother, because not only did she love her sister very much, but she also cared for her a lot, visiting her, taking her to doctor and hospital appointments and such. It was time for yet another Celebration of Life ceremony.

The ceremony was nice, and we got to hear stories about my aunt's life. The tough part came when one of her grandchildren talked about how they could sense that angels were present in the hospital room when my aunt died. That imagery really was touching and was a beautiful moment during the ceremony. Afterwards we had lunch, and everyone was talking about her laugh. We will all miss her unmistakable laugh, which I first heard when I was a little kid when she and my uncle would come over to visit. Everyone knew that laugh, and who it belonged to! After lunch we went to the cemetery to put my aunt's ashes in the niche. As we huddled together in the cold March air, we looked up and saw a beautiful eagle flying overhead, and we felt like it was her spirit saying a final goodbye.

After the funeral I had to gather myself again and get back to my computer training. I am happy to report that on March 10, just a few hours before my license for the program was to expire, I completed the program! That was grueling and exhausting, especially trying to do it as so many people were dying all around me. But I did it and I learned an awful lot about SAS computer programming, as well as my own fortitude in sticking to it. I only hope someday I can put those skills to use. So far that has not been the case. But it was a major accomplishment nonetheless!

Just as I completed my training it was once again time for March Madness, an entire month of college basketball and hockey games and tournaments. I really needed to find a job, but after the funerals and deaths and computer training, I really just needed a break. I wanted to do one thing and one thing only...watch sports. Once again, my friends headed to Vegas, but since I still didn't have a job there was no way I was going to go. This time around it was hard not to go since it was sort of a bonding so soon after Brian's death, as well as my friend Duane's mother's death. But I figured it would be best to skip the trip. I would have to settle for playing cards at someone's house instead of going to the desert with my pals.

Just after the first couple weeks of games wrapped up on Palm Sunday, I got a message from my friend Chris, the one whose mother was at Brian's wake. Apparently he had found his mother unconscious on her couch. They brought her to the hospital and a few hours later she had passed away from a brain aneurysm. My God, are you kidding me? I mean, really, are you kidding me? Another funeral? Ugh!!! So as I attended Holy Week masses and as I looked forward to our Easter Sunday celebration, my friend was preparing to bury his mother. After a nice Easter celebration, I went to my friend's mother's funeral on April 9. I remember that it was very cool and rainy and just very dreary. It was springtime, March Madness had just ended, and instead of a nice sunny day I was sitting in a church for yet another funeral. This one, though, was actually a funeral as the body was not cremated. Still I did not get a chance to pray in front of the casket because when I got there they were just starting to move everyone into the church, while the family gathered around the casket. Sadly, I had not seen any of my friends since Brian's funeral, so seeing Chris and my other friend Dave was nice, but the circumstances were not. After the funeral and the lunch I drove home thinking "When is this going to end? Can we please be done with the funerals for a while?" I was sad and miserable and once again pondered life and the afterlife and didn't think much about finding a job. I just didn't care.

A couple weeks later (I'm sure by now you know what I am going to say, but can you believe it?), I got another email from my mother. My parents met at a double wedding many years ago, and Mom told us one of the grooms from that wedding, a very good friend of my father's, had just passed away. So for my parents it was off to yet another funeral. I did not go since I did not know the man, but I thought to myself that if it was not for that man getting married all those years ago, my parents may never have met, and I may not be here. After all of that thinking about life and death and the afterlife, I suddenly

found myself thinking about the beginning of life, instead of the end. I started thinking about how fate brought my parents together, and whether or not I would ever find true love myself. That has not happened yet either.

About a month later, on May 15, I heard on the news that B.B. King had died. Wow, I thought, this guy was a legend and was a huge influence on Big Walter Smith, the leader of that blues band I played with long ago and who died in July 2012, just after I lost my job. B.B. King was a big influence on Walter, and Walter was a big influence on me. I was sad once again. After a couple days I was sitting on my deck and a song came to me. I call it Bad News Blues, and I wrote it in memory of B.B. King. Maybe someday I'll head into the studio to record the song, and maybe it will be on my next album.

The early weeks of spring were spent job searching and starting to write this book. As a matter of fact, the first words of this book were written on the same day B.B. King died. I continued to write my book, wrote more music, attended a few networking events and as the weather warmed up broke out the bike for a few trips around the lakes, which, along with some sunshine, I desperately needed after the tough winter of cold, cloudy weather and so many deaths.

I was enjoying the spring, when one day, while sitting on my front steps after lunch, I noticed a mother and a couple kids walking by my house. I could feel there was angst in one of the kids' voices. Then, out of the corner of my eye I spotted Whitey, hopping along the curb. One of the kids said "Hey look, a white squirrel!" Now, when people walk by, Whitey often comes right up to them thinking they are going to feed her. So as the kids drew closer, she walked right up to them. But I was concerned and thought to myself she better be careful. Sure enough, as soon as the other kid got close enough, he cocked his arm back and whipped a rock at Whitey!!! Whitey jumped in the air and ran off. I was sure that rock hit Whitey. I yelled at the kid, telling him not to throw things at the squirrel, and his mother thanked me for saying that. Still, the kid just retorted "I can do whatever I want." Wow, just, wow. Kids these days are so disrespectful. I waited a little while for Whitey to come back out of the bushes, but she didn't. So I walked over to the neighbor's house and, sure enough, there she was, just cowering in the bushes. She is never in those bushes and she never lets me get so close to her, but this time I could tell something was wrong. Luckily I didn't notice any wounds or blood. This white squirrel is a neighborhood treasure. Everyone loves her and tries to feed her and when people walk or drive by they stop to look, so I was just really pissed at that kid for hitting her with a rock. Besides, she was the inspiration for the title of this book, so she can't die on me, especially before the book is finished!

After all the people that had recently died, I would have been devastated if the one thing that brought me peace through all of my recent difficult times was suddenly killed too. Thankfully she was ok and I just sat on my haunches feeding her nuts for a good 15 minutes or so. She had never gotten so close to me, she basically came right up to my hands for the little goodies. Once again, I found such peace in sitting there just watching one of God's beautiful creatures munch on a snack. After a few minutes a couple more neighbors came by to feed her, and then the mother of those unruly kids came back without her kids and apologized for their behavior. She then told me she had an abusive husband and that he abused the kids too, so there was a bit of understanding as to why those kids were so unruly. It still didn't justify their actions. I was very glad Whitey was ok and went back into the house to continue my day. As the days went by I saw her bouncing around like normal. It appeared she was going to be alright.

About a week before the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend my mother asked me if I would like to go up to the cabin with them and my sister and her boyfriend to celebrate our nation's birth. I said yes. However, a day or so before we went to the cabin the son of my elderly next door neighbor, who had been in a nursing home for five years, leaving the house vacant the whole time, stopped by to move a few things around in the yard. He then told me he was going to be there every day for the next several weeks cleaning out the house. He finally got the Power of Attorney to take over his father's finances and sell the house. Although I wished I had neighbors over the last few years, it was also kind of nice to have some peace and quiet too. The old folks tended to yell loudly at each other sometimes. So I started to think about how long it would take for that house to get cleaned up and when the house would go on the market. The neighbors were real pack rats, and as of this writing six dumpsters have already been filled with junk and piles of boxes!

So it was off to the cabin for the Fourth of July weekend in northwestern Wisconsin. I was looking forward to the getaway because I knew starting Monday I'd be in for a whole lot of noise and commotion next door as they started to fill the dumpster. Friday night we pretty much just ate dinner and had a nice little bonfire, along with some stargazing, which I love to do when we are up there because you can see so many more stars when there are no city lights. My mind wandered ever more as I stared at the stars and thought about all the people that had recently left us. Where were they? I just couldn't stop thinking about the afterlife. Saturday, the 4<sup>th</sup>, we went hiking at a park with waterfalls for a few hours. After our hike we sat down for lunch at a picnic table in the park. Then, the pain train reared its ugly head again. My sister's phone rang, and it was my other sister calling to ask us if we had heard the terrible news. Our cousin's son, Kevin, had been killed in a car accident the night before. Oh, our hearts just sank and the mood was very somber as we started to eat. Apparently the driver had driven onto the shoulder of the highway, and, being young and inexperienced, overcorrected the steering wheel, sending the car rolling. On July 4<sup>th</sup>, of all days, another death. I was just incredulous and made a comment that I was not going to the funeral. I didn't know the kid and was just tired of going to funerals. I had already been to three just in 2015 alone! I didn't want to go to another one. But I went anyway, and I am so glad I did.

The next Friday was the funeral, and it was kind of nice because all three of my sisters and their families were able to make it, along with my father, mother and I. I got to the funeral a little bit early, and as soon as I walked in I noticed this was going to be a funeral to remember. This was the first time I had been to a funeral for someone so young. Kevin was just 16 years old. He was heavily involved in sports so a lot of his teammates wore their jerseys to the funeral. Seriously, there were so many people there that trying to get by people to see the collage was like going to a baseball game and waiting in line at the concession stand. There were so many people! As we walked into the church we found a place to sit. I looked around and noticed that the church was completely full. Later I found out that the church holds 750 people, which was close to my 500-600 person estimate. The place was packed. It was packed with people who Kevin loved and respected, and who loved him back. There was so much love and admiration for him just permeating all throughout the church during the ceremony. It was absolutely amazing. He was a very popular and well liked kid, and everyone came out to pay their respects. I learned a very valuable lesson that day. Treat everyone you meet with kindness and respect and show them you truly care about them, and you will make a lot of friends. Over 750 people showing up at his

funeral shows that his message rang loud and clear. To show my sympathy for his family, I wrote an original poem. I hope it brought them some comfort.

Looking back, I realize that I have really had bad luck around holidays recently. I got sick on Thanksgiving, Brian was terminally diagnosed right before Christmas, I had stomach problems of my own on Christmas Day, New Year's Day I spent watching Gopher football for the last time with my friend, Easter was preceded by my friend Chris's mother's death on Palm Sunday, and then Kevin died the day before Independence Day. Wow. **At this point, I think I'll hold my enthusiasm for upcoming holidays!**

After so much death and sorrow it was time for me to do some more writing, which you have just read. I also thought that it would be a good idea to get my music back online again and try to make a little money. After all, I wasn't finding anything close to the kind of job I was looking for, so why not make some money on the music I recorded well over a decade ago? I was thinking with all the new ways people can discover, purchase and listen to music now, maybe I would give it another shot. I was hoping that maybe somebody would hear my music and want to use it in a movie or commercial or something. I also wanted people to hear my lyrics, thinking maybe it could change their life. Sadly, a few weeks after I finished digitizing my music and getting it on CD Baby and notifying all my friends on Facebook, I logged into my account to find that I had sold a single CD...the one I bought myself to test the system. Ouch. A grand total of \$8.10 was sitting in my account, just waiting to be spent on whatever I wanted, perhaps a tasty Subway sandwich! I guess sometimes dead dreams are better left dead.

Although I had been a big fan of Subway for many years, I wasn't really a very healthy eater. That all changed in the summer of 2015. I decided it was time to change my diet a little bit, so I headed to Target and bought a big green bowl. Then I went to the grocery store and bought a ready-to-eat chicken and a bunch of ingredients for a giant salad. I also bought some corn on the cob, which I have always loved but have never eaten away from my parents' house. No idea why, just never have. It was time to get healthy, and hopefully slim my spare tire a little in the process! After all I had been through over the past few months, I can't tell you how wonderful it was to just sit down to a nice big salad and a hot, buttery cob of fresh sweet corn for lunch on a beautiful summer day with the wind gently blowing in through my window and a bird making his presence known from a nearby branch to entertain me.

After a summer of enjoying some nice healthy food, working out again and hitting the lakes for more biking and swimming, it was once again time to turn my attention back to my career. This time, though, things would be a little different.

**Before I get to that, however, I would like to take you back to that political meeting right before Thanksgiving that I mentioned, why I was there, what happened and my thoughts about some things.**

## **Lessons from Chapter 5**

Enjoy the moment...always.

Cherish time with family and friends, especially during the holidays.

Stay in touch with friends as best you can, don't wait until you see them at a funeral to reconnect.

Caring Bridge is a good website to keep people informed when a loved one is having health problems.

Losing your driver's license and your job is nothing compared to losing a best friend.

When you find out a loved one is going to die, spend as much time with them as you can, and by God, tell them you love them every chance you get, you never know when you will see them for the last time.

Don't judge people on how they spend their final days on Earth, it's their life that is ending, let them do what they wish.

Read the book or watch the movie Heaven is for Real...if nothing else, it will make you think.

When people are dying, they want to see family and friends and enjoy those last few moments, they don't want to think about death.

Stories are what bind people together, and it's fun to share them, no matter the situation, and it can help cheer someone up.

After someone dies, you do a lot of pondering and deep thinking, especially if you end up going to several funerals in a short period of time.

You truly don't know what you've got until it's gone.

After someone dies, remember the good times and know that they are in a better place. Be sad, but also have some joy knowing that they are now with the Lord.

Cremation takes away the opportunity for people to pray in front of the casket and pay final respects. It prevents a sense of closure. For that reason I would not recommend it, but I understand several factors are involved in deciding between cremation and burial.

If someone you know has a friend or loved one die, offer your support. Be there for them in any way you can.

After someone dies, it is good to be with family and friends for lunch or other activities to bond and reminisce.

It is incredible when someone is in a great deal of pain but does not complain about it. Remember that the next time something, anything, goes wrong in your life. Complaining does you no good. The best thing to do is just deal with the situation as best you can, and give your suffering up to God.

You should take as much time as you need, or as much as you can, to mourn. Don't rush into something if it's not totally necessary.

When you go to a funeral, listen closely to the scriptures and listen to comments from people about the deceased. You can learn a lot by observing and listening at a funeral.

You can reach your goals if you just stick to it and focus, regardless of what else is happening around you.

After you go through a difficult time, relax a little, even if you know you should be doing something else. Do something you enjoy. Take your mind off of what you have just been through and recharge your batteries. People really should do this.

If your buddies want to go on a trip after going through a rough time, you should go with them. Even if you can't afford it. The bonding is worth far more than the cost of the trip. I should have gone to Vegas with the guys after Brian died. I regret that.

If you don't yet know, ask your parents how they met. It's interesting to know the circumstances that arose that allowed you to ultimately be born.

If you have the ability, write a song or a poem in memory of someone who died. You can express your feelings as well as maybe even make someone else more at peace.

If you see kids doing something wrong, let them know they are in the wrong, even if it is not your child. The parents may thank you, but they also may not like it. It depends on the situation I guess.

Something as simple as a squirrel or a flower or a bird's song can bring peace to people going through difficult times.

Having a vacant house next to yours isn't always a bad thing. It can bring peace and quiet if it wasn't there before!

Get out and stare at the stars once in a while. Let your mind wander. Just think about life and your place in the universe.

Even if you don't want to go to a funeral, you should go if you can. The family of the deceased will definitely appreciate you sacrificing your time to come, and you just may benefit yourself.

Treat everyone you meet kindly, with respect, and show them that you really care about them. You will have many friends.

Some dreams are better left dead. Move on.