

It has been nearly 20 years, but my brother was my best friend. I am 30 years old now; he would have been 40 last summer – and yet, at 10 years old, he was my world – and he knew that; but he never took it for granted, ever, and that's why he was the person he was. He never took anything for granted, or anyone. I may have been more than ten years younger than him, but he knew that while he shaped his body, his mind, his person and his world, mine was a life that was similarly worth shaping, and molding, so that I would know what he knew, learn what he learned, and grow to do something that he did every single minute – simply LIVE. My brother lived. He lived his life, to the fullest extent possible. He lived every minute by feeling, by smelling, by looking and watching, by working, by working hard, by sweating, crying, learning and studying, by listening (sometimes), by sharing, by growing, and by guiding the rest of us. He did all of this because that's what he knew, and he did all of this so that he could play.

But to him, that WAS life; that was living. Some people simply play because they can't bear anything else, or don't have the capacity to do much more than that, and in doing so, they miss the whole point. My brother played because he realized that WAS the point. That WAS life, and it was all play for him. And so, along the way, he never took it for granted. He never took me for granted, or any of my brothers and sisters. Maybe it was because he knew, I wonder sometimes... because he knew that his term would be short. I wonder, sometimes, if he tried to compress every experience that the world might bring into as short a time as possible. At least that's how I remember it, and how I remember him. My brother was only 21.

Born in Poughkeepsie on August 13, 1967, Dan was the first child to my parents Daniel and Janet. My parents had met while working at IBM, that seemingly universal link between all of us living in the Mid-Hudson Valley. They were married October 8, 1966 and Dan was born the next year. But he would not be alone. Patrick, the next oldest, was born in October 1968. They were barely more than a year apart, and they would remain that close (despite a few hiccups that only high school can bring) until they could no longer be. Ann Marie was born three years later, and me seven years beyond that. Then came Jill and then the bomb – triplet boys. Instead of six, my parents were blessed with eight children, spanning a period of only 13 years. Dan was the oldest, of course, and nobody ever questioned that he and Pat were in charge. But, possibly because of what I mentioned above, there was this light that Dan carried with him always, this torch, a staff of sorts that saw him shepherding us all through life and his world. His vision was different; his passion was unique. And from what I know, it was always that way.

Above and beyond all things, Dan loved sports. He would come to dabble in all sorts of things, and nobody would argue that he was always striving to be a renaissance man in the way that he was willing to embrace new aspects of life, new ideas, travel, and music. But sports were his obsession. As most of us did, he played soccer when he was young, but it wasn't for him. He played baseball and was good at it, but eventually stopped that, too, because it wasn't satisfying him. (Ironically, at some point in life, he told me that he loved few things more than pitching a baseball...) In its place, however, he took up rowing in his senior year of high school and was good at that as well. How? Why? Because it was Dan, and if something piqued his interest, or something stirred his passion, he flung himself into it full force and wouldn't stop until it was something he could call his own. Basketball was the apex of this for him, his purest and most passionate outlet.

For those of us who knew him, we know he wasn't tall. We know that he probably gave the appearance of being quick but really wasn't so much... and if you've ever seen the triplets do anything athletic, you

know that Dan had little of the gifts that they have. But his gift was will, and determination; because he loved basketball so, it became his everything. And because it meant that much to him, he worked and worked and worked, tirelessly, at making it something that would sustain him through his life – both physically and emotionally. He shared that interest with Pat and passed it along to the rest of us. To me, it became the easiest thing of all to understand about him and the most clear and direct connection between the two of us in the time that we spent together. Sure, we played every sport there was together, in any makeshift way possible within the limitations of our home, our playroom, our fully-sloped front-yard and arching backyard. He would play me one-on-one in Wiffleball, for hours on a Saturday or on summer days when he was home. And I was only 8, or 9, or 10 and he was in high school or home from college. That is what he was to me, however, and the type of brother he was. They are some of my fondest memories of childhood.

We played when we were allowed to and when we weren't, in places where we should have and in places (again, in the house) where we shouldn't have... but it was all for the love of it, and it's something I know I carried forward to the triplets because he gave it to me. I have the same memories of playing with them the way Dan played with me. We endured our share of scoldings, of being chased around by our mother... but, sorry Mom, it was worth it – because as Dan taught us all, when you do something, when you play something, when you try something new, you are meant to go after it entirely, with all you have. And so we did... and still I never beat him.

But back to basketball... Dan loved it. He played varsity basketball at Franklin Delano Roosevelt High School in Hyde Park, the town in which he lived all his life (and during which he NEVER missed a day of school, probably because it would have meant missing practice...or because Mom simply wouldn't allow it...either way). In summers, Dan would run the basketball camp at FDR and it became his baby. My brothers, Jill and I would go to camp every week that we could, and I would hang with him in every moment I wasn't playing... and he would let me, without a second thought.

When it came time for college, I am still positive in my mind that, despite all of the schools my parents had taken him to visit, he decided to attend Villanova University outside Philadelphia primarily because they had just happened to win the National Championship in basketball in April of that year. Dan chose Villanova despite his love for Patrick Ewing and Georgetown, again because it was life that he was after, and Villanova seemed the place to be. (The Patrick Ewing thing was remedied shortly thereafter when the Knicks won the first pick in the NBA lottery, sending my brother into a frenzy that included running up and down our hallway, shrieking and screaming with satisfaction, a moment I will never forget.)

When he went off to Villanova, he tried-out for the basketball team as a walk-on and was, according to my best memory, the last one to be cut. It had become his mission to play for the team and he worked hard at his game whenever he could for that tryout. Every time Villanova was on TV, as much as we were excited to feel that Dan was somewhere in that crowd, I remember cursing, in my mind, that last guy on the bench thinking he had taken something away from my brother. But if you knew Dan, if you know at all what he was about, never making that team did little to extinguish his passion for life. While at Villanova, he had joined Zeta Psi fraternity and was introduced, and became integral to, a whole new network of people and great friends. He also found the love of his life, which was no surprise... Dan was always a romantic as well. To this day, a Casablanca movie poster hangs in his room at my parent's house.

At Villanova, he played pick-up games incessantly and won intramural leagues and three-on-three tournaments held on campus. At times, he would practice with the team and he was loved for his talent and determination. In all my life, I will never forget being introduced to some of the players that graduated from Villanova the same year as Dan, some of my favorite players of all-time, and the pride that I felt in hearing them tell me that they knew my brother, and that he was a special person. I didn't need them to tell me that, but it was still magical to me. It was vindication, in a way, for the fool that cut him, satisfying, and sad all the same. I remember wishing he could have been there on that day so that they could have told him what they told me.

My brother was diagnosed with cancer in November of his senior year at Villanova. He never made it to graduation. The night when my parents, and we, found out, is as ingrained in my mind as any moment in my life. Unfortunately, it would quickly be superseded as the saddest moment in my life when he passed a little more than five months later.

I can't pretend to know a whole lot about my brother's illness but for the toll it took on my parents – who were doing all they could to protect us from his pain – and the image in my mind of the last time I saw him alive. Dan was being cared for at the hospital at the University of Pennsylvania. My parents made the trip what seems like thousands of times back and forth between Hyde Park and Philadelphia. There were many nights when they had to wake us all to let us know that my aunt and uncle were coming over to watch us because they had to run down to be with Dan. We never knew, exactly, what it all meant, but we understand it was so very challenging on my parents. And for Pat, who would often run down from Lehigh to be with him sooner than my parents could arrive.

In early 1989, my parents took us all down to see Dan in the hospital at the University of Pennsylvania. In January of that year he had had surgery to remove the tumor in his leg that caused him to go to the doctor in the first place. As part of that surgery, he received a femur replacement. All I can remember wondering, thinking, and asking my parents – and Dan, himself – was whether he would be able to play basketball again. Of course he assured me that he would because he knew it mattered so much to me and because I was afraid for how his life would be without basketball. He probably knew he might never be able to play again, as well as that he had many more hurdles ahead of him.

I can still remember what I wore the day we went to visit him in the hospital; it was that big of a day for me. But the images of my sick and emaciated brother soon took center stage in my mind, and still do. I remember his face being incredibly sunken, his hair obviously gone. I struggled to look at him because it was not the person I had known; this was not my brother. We were able to roll him out of the room at some point, into the hallway, so that he could get some air, I guess, as much as that is possible in a hospital, and to see the Philadelphia skyline. I remember him eating grapes and thinking that was a good thing, but I really didn't know. When they brought him back into the room, the nurses had to transfer him back into the hospital bed; it took two of them, plus my parents, to lift him up. He couldn't do it himself. My mother told us to turn away and to look out the window so that we wouldn't have to see him in that way. But I couldn't help myself. I looked back, over my shoulder, and could see his bones, his spine. There was nothing to him. During the transfer, my brother slipped a bit and tried to hold himself up with his right arm, and did for a few seconds, enough for the nurses to get him to the hospital bed safely. I remember my Dad consoling my Mom after that, pleading with her to remember

how he had held himself up and how it was a positive step. I wondered how much worse could it have been...?

And yet, to this day, I remember his eyes more than anything. The areas around his pupils were completely yellow, and there was little recognizable about them. I wondered if he could really see me and how much he remembered of me; I wondered what this illness had done to his mind and spirit. Later in the day, as the nurses attended to Dan, I found myself struggling to go back in that room. I can't say what it was, specifically, but you can imagine the sadness I, and we all, felt... and the confusion. At some point, however, despite all that he was dealing with, my brother called to me. He said, "Bri, get over here...." And so I went, even though I didn't want to. When he brought me close, he asked me about basketball. He asked me how I was doing and how the season was going, and we talked about it as if nothing had changed and he was simply away at college and getting the rundown. In those moments, I forgot that he was sick and I realized that his eyes were not reflecting his soul at that point, instead simply the chemicals that were intending to fight the cancer that had, by this point, spread to his lungs. This really was my brother, and it was, in a nutshell, what he was to me. He was a mentor, a gift, a rock and, above all things, my best friend. I don't think I ever told him that, but he knows... or I hope he knows... he'd better know.

Today, I am the person that I am, in significant part, because of him. My younger brothers and I both went to Villanova, my sisters to rival Big East schools (but we can forgive...), and Pat to Lehigh only an hour from where Dan was. I am sure that Dan opened those doors for us. He opened our eyes to a world beyond what we knew, to something greater than we had ever expected to see. In some ways, I know my decision to go to Villanova was because I wanted to finish what he had started. I had actually made a promise to myself years earlier to take that on, because I saw it as a way for me to give him what he'd worked so hard for and what he deserved to achieve. Despite his passing, my brother received a degree from Villanova. But he never stood on that field for graduation. He died on April 26th, 1989 – twenty years ago this April.

On May 14, 2000, on both my Mom's and the triplets' birthday, with the rest of my family in the bleachers sharing it with me, I attended commencement at Villanova and fulfilled my brother's dream and mine. I wish he could have been there with us; in my heart he was. But that's no surprise – he is there everyday. Somehow, some way, because of who he was and what he meant to me, the 21-year-old that I remember is still my shepherd in life, despite the fact that I am now much older than he was ever able to be. But it doesn't matter – Dan was, and always will be, my older brother. And when I think of him, I am content with being 10 years-old and with seeing the world through his rose-colored glasses... In some ways, despite the sadness of his tragedy and his passing, his suffering and his pain, the silver-lining to what my brother endured is that he never had to fully grow-up, be it in his mind or in ours. He is eternally young, eternally at play, and eternally our shepherd. In reality, I don't want to see it any other way.