

Remembering Paul

27-Aug-2005

Introduction

Paul has left us after just 16 years. We were beginning to see glimpses of the man he would become, and his future looked bright. While we mourn the years that are not to be, we are thankful for the 16 wonderful years we had with him.

What were those years like? They were frightening at first when we brought the tiny bundle home and wondered what we were doing. Gradually, though, we began to know the new resident of our house. He was a joy to be around, and we loved spending time with him. We found a person that was smart, funny, kind, interesting, loving and humble (seriously!). How do we know he was these things? I'll try to explain.

Smart

Paul's parents are both engineers, but he showed little interest in engineering subjects. Although he did well with science, math, and the other school subjects, he much preferred the study of different cultures, languages, and art, and he was encouraged to learn as much as he could (of course, he still had to learn the science and math!). His ancient Egyptian book collection is better than the library's, and his art library may be close. But not being content with learning just from books, Paul was an avid museum goer. From Chinese terracotta soldiers in Santa Barbara to shrunken heads in San Diego, Da Vinci paintings in San Francisco and Washington D.C., mummies in Santa Ana, King Tut treasures in Los Angeles, British portraits and George Washington's false teeth in San Marino, stinky flowers in Fullerton, Paul saw it all.

It was especially fun to visit Egyptian exhibits with him. While the adults read the English placards at each object, Paul would read the hieroglyphs on the object itself, and they would match! Before long there'd be a tour group following him around. Needless to say, we stopped reading the placards.

Paul also loved learning by doing. He panned for gold in the American River, snorkeled in Hawai'i and Catalina, hiked in the woods, deserts, mountains and beaches of 13 states plus Washington D.C. and Canada. His backyard garden includes stinky flowers, Venus flytraps, basil, mint, and catnip. He made his own pesto from scratch, baked bread, and every Friday treated the family to home-made pizza from scratch.

Funny

Of course, Paul was not serious all the time. He had a great sense of humor. He loved the old silliness: The Three Stooges, The Marx Brothers, Charlie Chaplin, Looney Tunes. He loved the new silliness: The Simpson's, Monty Python, Benny Hill, Animaniacs.

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In art class he chafed at being asked to draw certain pictures instead of being allowed to doodle on his own, but he managed to sneak something he liked into each picture anyway. For example, if the assignment was to draw a living room scene, somehow the Mona Lisa would end up hanging on the wall, and Paul's favorite cat would be looking through the window.

When cleaning up the sidewalks after the lawn was mowed, he called himself "The Grim Sweeper". He was constantly coming up with corny jokes and bad puns like that.

Kind

Paul was kind to everyone and everything. His pampered his cat, who adored him (this cat would actually come when it was called).

When less than 2 years old, he saw pictures of Somalian kids on television and asked very probing questions about them, and felt bad for them. As he got older, he asked similar questions about the people he saw at Home Depot looking for work, or people he saw in the strawberry fields. He was always wondering whether other people were living well enough.

Loving

Paul loved his family, even the extended family he rarely saw. After every trip to Hawai'i he would come back and tell his mom how much he liked all his cousins, and how he couldn't believe he was really related to so many people. He also loved our local California "adopted" families (you know, those friends that are so close they may as well be family). Paul loved learning about his family history, and would sit all night listening to stories about our childhoods.

Paul tried hard to be kind to his younger brother, Adam, who is very difficult to live with and constantly breaking things and doing embarrassing things in public.

Paul was always very concerned when his mom or dad were sick. Even when he was just a toddler he would do everything he could to help out, even if that just meant being quiet.

Humble

We always thought Paul was a special person, but while he knew he was smart, he really had no idea how special he was and how he affected people. He was just Paul.

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Conclusion

Paul was very shy and reserved, but if he was comfortable with you he could talk and talk. He began talking at such an early age that he was able to tell us what it was like in the womb, and how frightening it was to be born. One of his memories was a particular song from a particular piece that I was practicing before his birth. This song always comforted him. I'd like to play it for him one more time, and I hope that it also brings some comfort to us.