

To her baby brother

Written and designed by Kyle Peterson



I watched as my girlfriend K walked up onto the stage after her parents spoke. The silence of the chapel hall was broken up by her words: "To my baby brother ..."

I listened and everything that I was thinking and feeling went on hold. I was sitting next to her aunt and her best friend. Catharsis spread through us, and probably many others in that room, though I wouldn't know who else it happened to. All I could do was listen and cry.

I met Joshua Bierma in summer 2022 when I visited Sioux Falls for the first time to be introduced to K's family. She had told me about him before, and that he was born with Down syndrome. Even though I had never met him, she often showed me photos from her camera roll. I was still somewhat nervous to meet him for the first time. I'd never really known someone with Down syndrome before, so what would be different about this?

All of those worries were pushed aside when I finally met Josh. He was a loud, energetic kid, just like any other 11 year-old.

But K had still told me about what the future would look like for Josh. As a side effect of his Down syndrome, he fought with pulmonary hypertension, where pressure in his blood vessels was too high and led to extra

strain on the heart. Suffice to say, he wasn't likely to live as long as his sister. She would have to say goodbye at some point. Little did I know that I wouldn't even be ready for that.

As I sat in the third row of the chapel seating, I reflected on what I had learned from him. In the short time I had with Josh, what impact did he have on me? And then it came to me, almost out of nowhere. I heard the idea tossed around in the service, but it never really hit me, until ...

Josh loved others more than anyone I'd ever seen. To him, there was never race, gender, *anything*. Everyone around him was a person, equally deserving of love. He had his favorites, sure (his sister), but he could warm up to anyone.

I sat there thinking, *I want to be like he was. I want to love people as unconditionally as he did.* He was the best example of a Christian that I had ever seen.

So I sat in silence, and I listened to K speak about him.

"I'll think of you all the time. I love you, baby brother. Love, sister."

April 22, 2024, would have been his 13th birthday. I miss you, Josh. Can't wait to see you again.

Love, Kyle. ©

