

MEMORIAL SERVICE REMARKS

BACKGROUND: Some close friends asked me to speak on their behalf at the memorial service for their 26-year-old son, Eric. The talk was to be 20 minutes, the main part of the program.

It was the hardest writing assignment I have ever had: Three weeks earlier, this exuberant, charismatic young man had hanged himself.

John Boykin, www.ApplegateLLC.com/John

There's no pretty face we can put on this, no sense to be made of this, no good to come out of this. It's a terrible tragedy, and that's all there is to it.

But this is an occasion to recall what an extraordinary human being Eric was, the range of ways he affected so many lives, and why we all not only loved but enjoyed him so much.

Our highest calling on this earth is to give love away to whoever needs it, however they need it, whenever they need it. None of us does that consistently or nearly often enough. But Eric was the kind of person who did it more consistently than most of us.

Eric was a helper. Jennifer says he came into the world that way. When he was about 4, she broke her ankle. Coming home from the hospital, she heard this sweet little voice say, "Mom, let me help you out of the car."

As a young adult, Eric tended to be the one to step in whenever a situation called for that.

For example, one day when he was in high school marching band, some crazy stranger crashed a rehearsal, yelling and waving his arms around. The director stopped and asked the guy to leave, but that just made him yell louder. The situation was getting out of hand. So Eric set down his drum, hopped up onto the stage, and calmly escorted the guy away – in a headlock. (You never know when those karate skills just might come in handy.)

Eric's helping instinct is why he gravitated to some of the jobs he had. His interests and passions had not yet jelled into a specific career, but they did consistently reflect a deep and genuine kindness to other people: He was an emergency medical technician, a tissue donation coordinator, and he was working on the prerequisites to get into nursing school.

We all have different aptitudes, so we all impact our little corners of the world in different ways. Some of us excel professionally. Some excel athletically. Or financially, maternally, artistically, academically.

Eric excelled socially. He had that special sauce that I for one sure wish I could get a bottle of.

But Eric was never a stereotype and was certainly no saint. Like all of us, he was a complex, contradictory person, by turns charming, exasperating, friendly, impulsive, warm, intense, lively.

He could be remarkably generous. He could be moody.

He could be the perfect gentleman. He could indulge in wild excess.

Quiet gardener. Intense musician pounding his drums.

Sweet. Loud.

His impulsiveness is the characteristic probably most relevant to today. He was prone to taking things to extremes and would quickly form strong feelings about something and then hold fast to that regardless of what anyone else thought.

That impulsiveness could have terrible consequences, but it was also intrinsic to the way the guy ticked and a big part of what made him special. For example, the person who trained him to tend bar at Chili's recalled Eric asking him once, "Why are you so nice to everyone?" The guy answered, "because I never want any enemies in life." Eric impulsively replied, "From this day forward, I don't care how busy I am behind this bar, or in life, I am going to be nice to everyone, because I don't want to die knowing I have any enemies." And he clearly didn't.

[Other Eric stories]

Eric felt things deeply if he felt them at all: joy, anger, love, indignation. His passions included

fun

fun

fun

playing games, playing drums, doing karate, brewing beer, laughing, friends, and making things grow in his garden.

He tended to throw himself headlong into whatever he did. Music, for example. One of his bandmates wrote on Facebook that whenever his band played a gig, "During literally every show he would come running out from behind the drumset to cheer with the crowd or lead in a chant or perform some sort of antic. He had so much energy and love for the music he just couldn't contain it all behind the drumset in the back of the stage. He loved the excitement and energy and lived to have a good time."

Eric's life was shorter than most. But it was also fuller than most.

**** *[Ask if anybody has anything they want to say]* ****

The loss of Eric is a powerful reminder that we never know how long we might have someone, that we can never assume that the people in our lives today will be there tomorrow.

It is also a powerful reminder that we never really know what's ticking inside someone else: what worries, pressures, torments they may be going through.

So, what can we do about this sorry state of affairs? As corny as it sounds, we can make a point of giving love away to each person in our lives. Right now. Today.

The point is not that giving them love will make their problems go away. It won't. After all, Eric got massive doses of love from his family, his friends, Traci. The point is that loving them is what we can do – sometimes all we can do.

And it's the one thing we must never fail to do.

We all watched Eric grow up into a complex, contradictory young man, and we were all looking forward to watching him fulfill his immense potential. He chose a different route, and that was his choice. We can never make sense of it, never agree with it, never reconcile ourselves to it. We can only respect it.

His decision.

The natural question, of course, is, What could we have done to prevent it? But the question is nonsense. No one else can prevent your decision, and you can't prevent someone else's.

It's pointless to beat ourselves up about "if only I had done this" or "I should have done more of that."

Nonsense.

We can try to influence other people's decisions, but there's no way to predict – and certainly no way to control – which choices someone else will make tomorrow or what effect if any our influence will have.

We're all just amateur people struggling to do our best. And the best we can do is to love the people in our lives and let them know we love them. Eric knew how much every single person here loved him. And that's the best anyone can do.

We can only speculate about what fed into Eric's decision. But it was his decision. This is not "God's will": God does not want this kind of thing any more than any of us do.

A person is much more than a body: We are each also a personality, a spirit, our relationships, and the ways we touch the lives of other people. Today we leave behind Eric's body. But what remains of Eric – what we take away with us – are the memories of how he enriched our lives year after year after year.

There's no comfort we can take in the way Eric left this world. But there is immense comfort in the way he inhabited this world. We are all better off because he lived. This land is a better place for his having walked it.

With his rakish smile, warm hugs, and genuine interest, he made anyone he encountered feel a little better, feel listened to, feel important. Thank God we had him as long as we did.

Let's remember Eric not for the way he left our world, but for the way he brightened it.