

Eulogy for Timothy Burke, 3, by his father Michael Burke on 6/18/05

Death is an angel sent down from above

Sent for the buds of the flowers we love

Truly tis so, for in Heaven's own way

Each soul is a flower in the Master's bouquet.

When the Stanley Brothers sang those lines back in 1949, little could they imagine that the Master would wait until now to pick the most beautiful flower of all for his bouquet. Little could any of us imagine that He would come for Timothy so quickly, and so soon.

One of the things I have heard most frequently from folks over the past few days was: I am speechless; I don't know what to say; there just are no words. It is my job today to find some words to describe what Timothy meant to me, to my family, to all of us. I hope I don't fail him.

As Timothy lay in his hospital bed, one of the many, many things I said to him was "Thank you." Thank you for bringing 3 and ½ years of joy and happiness into my life, into all of our lives. Every single day, Timothy brought a smile to my face and laughter to my heart. These have been the best 3 ½ years I have ever known, and for that I will be forever grateful.

Whether it was racing with his brother to the back of the CVS to be the first to press the "Go" button on the blood pressure machine; or helping my stylist wash my hair at the salon; or putting on his favorite hardhat and toolbelt at pre-school; or going down to the town pier with his brother and me and trying to walk on the floats without falling in; or simply sitting in my lap and watching TV with me and his mother, Timothy brought me joy every moment of the day.

Now, everywhere I look, I see memories of Tim. The things we did, and the things we didn't get to do.

I drive by King's Beach and think of our last night together, Timothy, Matthew, and I, throwing rocks into the ocean and looking for hermit crabs in the tide pools. I pass by the train station and remember teaching him the other day why the engine is sometimes at the front of the train and sometimes at the end. I cried the other day at Panera Bread thinking of how much he loved his peanut butter and jelly sandwiches every Saturday morning after swim lessons, fighting with his brother over who would get his pickle.

I saw a picture in the paper of a scene from Salem Willows and recalled how much I wanted to take him back there someday. I came across a schedule of boat rides to the Boston Harbor Islands and remembered my plans to take him out there someday. I saw an e-mail I wrote to someone about places to take him horse-riding someday. And, of course, I always think of the two concerts we had tickets to this summer, Tim and I, and how excited he was that we would be sitting in the Front Row for both.

In so many ways, watching Tim grow up was like watching a child grow up for the first time. Tim and his brother are so very different; the experiences that we had with Matthew are totally opposite from Tim. Timothy had a hunger for learning new things. He always wanted to know what you were doing, and always wanted to share experiences with you. Whether it was singing my awful country music with me, helping his mother pay bills on the computer, watching the Red Sox on TV with us, cleaning the yard at Grammy's house, playing Just Me and My Dad on Gram's computer; cooking brownies in the kitchen, looking at things in the newspaper with me, or hitting the ball off the tee in our backyard, Tim always wanted to do things together with people.

And Holidays with Tim were a particular joy. Where for Matthew, Christmas is just another day of the week, Timothy opened his gifts, Matthew's gifts, my gifts, his mother's gifts, Grampa's gifts, everyone's gifts with an almost aerobic energy. And on Halloween when Matthew was satisfied with the treats in his bag, Timothy wanted to forge on, to hit every house in town.

And he could learn things fast. Show him once and he got it. Whether it was using the remote control to find his favorite episode of American Builder in the On Demand section; learning how to navigate the Haunted House scavenger game at the Garfield.com website; learning how to ride his tricycle; or learning how to make popcorn in the microwave (the bag goes up this way and you press the button twice), he attacked every new task with a voracious desire to learn.

I am so thankful for having Timothy in my life. I am so thankful for all the wonderful adventures we had together: Our trip to Greenfield, MA to see one of his favorite bands, the Old Crow Medicine Show. Sitting right down front and screaming the name of song so loud that the guitarist had to tell him to stop. Our trip to Brunswick ME to see King Wilkie play. Our family trip to Plymouth to see Thomas the Tank Engine at Edaville Rail Road. Our trips to the train station to see the 6:20 express tear through; even our trips to Stop and Shop to buy bagels for his brother's breakfast. Especially, though, I am grateful for our recent family trip to Florida. A trip that I didn't want to take, as I didn't think it was a good time for us to go. That trip will forever remain in my memory as one of the last things we did as a family.

Timothy, I pray that you are safe in God's hands. I pray that you help us learn how to live without you in our lives. I pray that what happened to my family never happens to another, because the pain is just too much to bear.

I want to thank each and every one of you from the bottom of my heart, for all the caring, love, and support you have shown us during this trying time. The cards, the letters, the flowers, the food you have sent is overwhelmingly generous. For each of you who has worked so hard to make this church so beautiful and inviting. And for all of you to take time out of your busy lives to share this day with us, is truly comforting. I know many of you have traveled great distances to be with us today: from towns throughout the state; from other states, even from as far away as Germany. Even if you just came from down the street, it means the world to us that you are here to share this sad moment with us.

Before I finish, do me a favor and make sure you hug your children and family members and tell them how much you love them, every chance that you get. Because you just never know. When I dropped Timothy off that Thursday morning, I never could have dreamed that the last words I would say to him were “Goodbye Monster.”

Gathering flowers for the Master's Bouquet

Beautiful flowers that will never decay

Gathered by angels and carried away

Forever to bloom in the Master's Bouquet

Thank you Timothy, for everything you brought to my life. I shall never forget you, and will always love you.

Timothy William Burke

October 23, 2001 -- June 15, 2005