

THE POSTSCRIPT

The Park School of Baltimore | PO Box 8200 Brooklandville, MD 21022

December 20, 2007

Volume LXVIII Issue No.4

Tragedy brings school to a halt

Fire claims the lives of sophomore Matt Young and his sister Abby

by **Tony DeMarco '08**

Park has gone through troubled times before, but none like what the community is experiencing now. On Thursday, December 6, a fire started at the Roland Park home of sophomore Matt Young. According to the *Baltimore Sun*, when firefighters arrived on the scene, flames were blowing from windows, and Matt and his 11-year-old sister Abigail Young were trapped on the second floor.

At an assembly called quickly for 8:30 that morning, Upper School Principal Mike McGill told a hushed student body that Matt and his father were in critical condition, and that his sister had not survived. Some began sobbing, but most sat quietly as words failed McGill.

With first period delayed until 9:00, most returned to

the Upper School hallway and sat in stunned silence.

Many teachers were too distraught to teach classes. "I was very shaken," said Dorrie Bright. "The day of the news, I had my ninth graders and they were stunned. We hung out and talked a little bit, and then one of the girls asked if they could make cards for Matt, and some of us did."

Thursday and Friday schedules returned to normal, although many students did not.

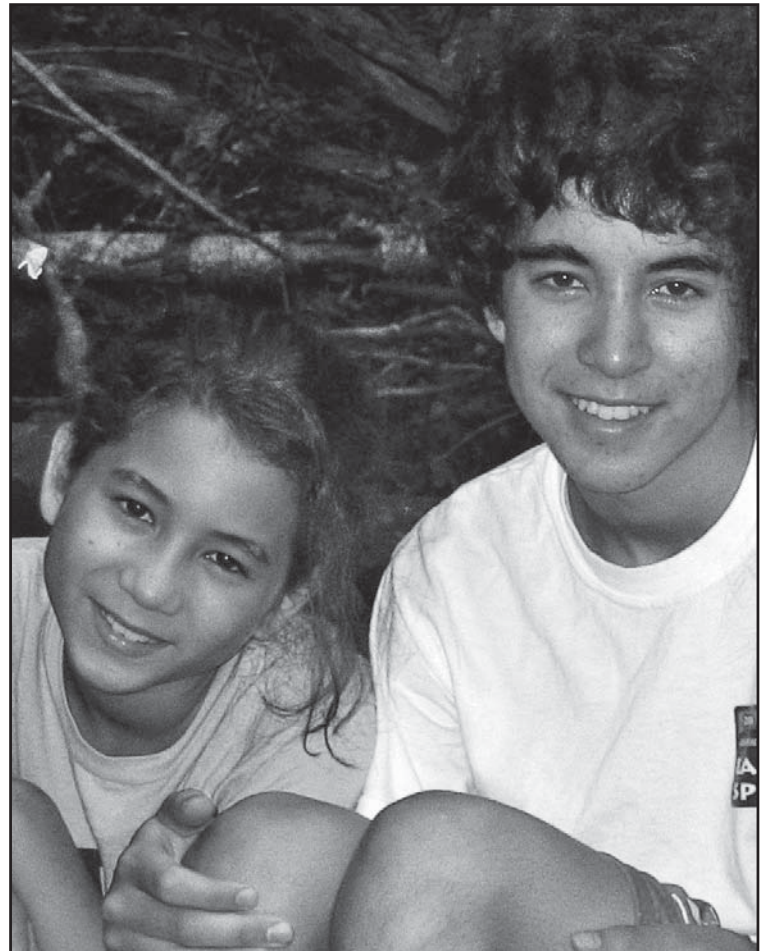
On Saturday, Head of School Michael Eanes sent an e-mail to all Park families informing them that Matt had died on the morning of Saturday, December 8. His father had been transferred from the University of Maryland Friday to be close to him.

"Of all the years I have been at Park, nothing like this has ever happened," said music teacher Adele Dinerstein, a fac-

ulty member since 1992. "Nothing has been this devastating."

Classes were suspended on Monday and another special assembly was held. Doug Jameson played Camille Saint-Saens' "The Swan" and "Arioso" by J. S. Bach on cello, accompanied by Dinerstein. Sophomores Zeke Kelly and Ben Redgrave performed a song Zeke wrote and composed for Matt. Rev. Christopher Leighton gave a comforting speech to help students recover from their grief. (See p.8 for the full text.) The rest of the day was spent in small group, discussion based counseling and activities before the Upper School dismissed at noon.

Bright said, "As we moved back into classes on Tuesday and Wednesday I tried to say something at the beginning of class along the lines of, 'we are not moving on and things are not back to normal.'"



News Commentary

Community celebrates the lives of Matt and Abby

by **Sam Cornblath '10 and Mariama Eversley '10**

Although the memorial service for Matt and Abby Young was scheduled to start at 10:00 am, by 9:00, the Second Presbyterian Church was filled with a chokingly sad and silent atmosphere. Not only did Park School tenth graders and Middle School students from Calvert School come to mourn the loss; students from a variety of grades, parents, teachers, and administrators came from both Calvert and Park to celebrate Matt's and Abby's lives. "The whole Park community came out and supported each other,"

said Sydney Smith '10. "It was evident how many people Matt and Abby had touched through academics, and their many extracurricular activities."

Laurie Gray, one of the Young family's cousins, opened the service with a beautiful violin solo, "Meditation from Thais" by Jules Massenet. Later, Calvert Middle School students stood as one division to sing a touching and sweet song entitled "Silhouette Child", bringing tears to many eyes. Along with these performances, members of the community performed several other string pieces in honor of Matt and Abby. Park's a cap-

pella groups, Eight Notes and Vocal Chords sang "Precious Lord" as a choral benediction.

Right before the service started, two church ushers placed pictures of Matt and Abby next to their respective caskets. Matt's picture depicted him at the beach waving with one of his usual smiles. It seemed as though he was alive and actually standing there waving at us. In Abby's picture she had her pajamas on, and was wearing a Santa hat. She seemed to be dancing around all those who will miss her dearly. Both pictures embodied their strong and enthusiastic spirits and honored their lives.

An insert to the church program was a collage of photos depicting Matt and Abby which their sisters, Laura '03 and Carrie '07, had compiled. Some photos were recognizable from Facebook, but others were baby photos salvaged from their house. All of the pictures captured Matt well and showed his curious, all knowing, humble, humorous, goofy, and loving attitude.

Although we did not have the privilege of meeting Abby, we got a very good sense of who she was from various sermons and speeches. The family remarks, delivered by Laura and Carrie, were amazing and powerful. Both Laura and Carrie were incredibly strong, not shedding a single tear until the very end of their speeches, and their presence and public speaking ability far surpassed all of the other speakers. Their descriptions of Matt and Abby illustrated their best qualities. Laura and Carrie showed us how much Abby loved life and how much she cared about her brother. In *Something We Don't Know*, Reverend Dr. Tom Blair talked about Abby starting the school year at Calvert. "When asked to write five words about herself for her class she said, 'My dog, my cat, basketball, lacrosse, and candy.'"

As friends of Matt, we felt that the sermon paralleled the

Matt we knew and loved. "His wisdom glowed off the page, a guy who could argue a point and win, all while being humble..." said Reverend Jenn DiFrancesco in *And a Child Shall Lead Them...* "He was always there to help and knew the right words at the right time, but he never rubbed it in. Everyone also knew him as the "Seventh Pussycat Doll." "He could dance better than any girl in the room," said DiFrancesco during her homily. One point that DiFrancesco got across was his ability to be himself in any situation. No matter where he was, Matt was always the same person, never fake and always true to himself and others.

Throughout the service you could feel the love and respect for Matt and Abby pulsating through the church. Being at the church was heart breaking. Both Matt and Abby had so much going for them. They were smart, athletic, artistic and genuine people. "Nothing can ever be fulfilling, but this was a great commemoration," said Hannah Mitchell '10.

"This was great closure," added Smith. "We must find the strength to press on."

Our greatest sympathies go out to the Young family. We will always remember and love Mary Abigail Young and Matthew Sam Young.



EDITORIAL

Postscript suffers loss of enthusiastic writer

by Ben Levin '08

The tragedy that struck the Young family, the Park community, and the greater Baltimore community has greatly affected us at *The Postscript*. Not only were Matt's older sisters on *Postscript* staff during their times at Park, but Matt was, too. Laura, Matt's oldest sister, was a Special Issues editor, and Carrie was an editor-in-chief. Last year, dad Steve Young, a deputy copy desk chief for the *Baltimore Sun*, spoke to *Postscript* staff about copy editing. As for Matt, not only was he one of our best writers, but he was the ideal reporter. His articles were thorough and well written; they almost always included more than the minimum number of interviews and required very little editing--rare for a high school newspaper.

The deadline for our December issue was December 7, the day after tragedy struck, and sure enough, Matt had already finished his article way ahead of time. His article wasn't any ordinary article either; it was arguably the biggest news story about Park School in recent memory. Matt, as our top news writer, had been assigned to cover the appointment of our new head of school, Dan Paradis. Someone who had seen the article said that it was well-written, and that Matt had conducted six interviews.

Last year, during my time as Sports editor, Matt asked me if he could write an

article about the Baltimore Bayhawks of Major League Lacrosse in anticipation of their upcoming move to Washington. As an avid lacrosse fan, Matt was passionate about the fact that Baltimore, the center of the lacrosse world, was losing its professional team. I didn't think there was going to be much to write about; I was expecting a few opinionated paragraphs. What I received was a two-page article filled with facts, commentary, and interviews from various sources. Matt was even able to get quotes from members of

the Bayhawks about their move. As usual, Matt went far beyond what was expected of him and wrote a brilliant article.

What we can all take from this tragedy are not only the lessons that Matt taught us about being kind, enthusiastic, and genuine, but we can change the way we live our lives. It may be cliché to say it, but it's time we stop taking things for granted. It's time we stopped fighting with our parents over stupid things, time we stop neglecting family because we want to be with our friends, and time we start appreciating the people around us.

As an athlete, I frequently hear the phrase, "Play like there's no tomorrow." Well, I think it's about time that we start living like there's no tomorrow.

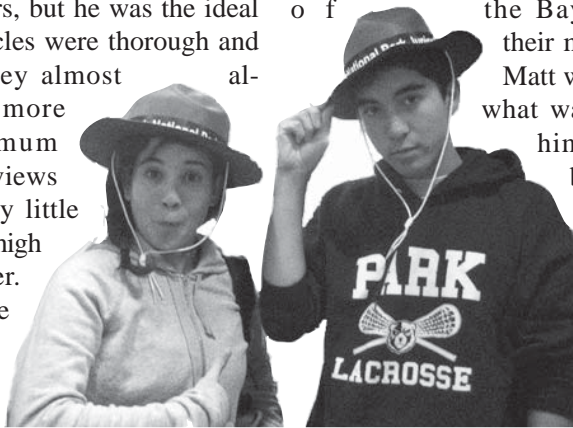


photo by A. Patel '08

Living for others

by Ben Goldstein '08

Tragedy has a way of making us reflect and telling us what's important. Recently, I argued in an English paper that personal happiness is what we, as humans, should all strive for in life; that as long as we are happy and enjoying life as individuals, we are somehow fulfilling our mission or purpose. If Matt's death has taught me anything, it is that I was wrong.

Hearing friends and classmates talk about Matt in the days after his death, one particular quote stuck with me: "Everybody loved Matt. You couldn't find one person who had a bad thing to say about Matt." According to everybody who knew him, Matt was an amazing person. His friends said that he had the ability to brighten anyone's day and could make people laugh at any given time.

I began to reflect. What would people say about me if I passed away? Would people really say that I was loved by everybody? That I brightened people's days? That I was nice to everybody? I'm not sure I know the answer to that question. I do, however, know

that there is certainly more on earth than just obtaining personal happiness; there is the power that each of us has to make others happy. That's something Matt's taught me over the past week.

Whatever goal or purpose or grand reason we have of being on earth, Matt, you reached it. To have thousands of

"Everybody loved Matt. You couldn't find one person who had a bad thing to say about Matt."

people recount their amazing memories with you—to have people claim that their lives were touched by you—to have people remember you as a person who did it all, and did it all while making others happy—Matt, you have made it. You will always be remembered as a loving and caring person who touched the lives of others and could bring a smile and a laugh to the face of anyone. When it comes down to it, what more can a human being accomplish?

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Policies

We welcome letters to the editor. Please send letters to postscript@parkschool.net, or through the Contact Us section at www.parkpostscript.com. We reserve the right to edit all submissions for language and length.

Many photos for this special issue were contributed by the Young family

SPECIAL ISSUE

The Postscript | December 20, 2007

Media coverage sinks to level of blogs

Reputable news stations caught up in age of internet blogs start to value speed over truthfulness

by *Postscript Staff*

People trust the media. Political biases aside, we as a public accept much of everything reported by CBS, NBC, ABC, Fox, or CNN to be the honest truth. Until this month, I was among the ignorant masses who believed that if it is on the evening news, it must be true. What possible reason could the news stations have for incorrectly relating events? It is their entire job just to get the truth out to the public, right? Well this month, my unfettered belief in all things reported was shattered to the core with the local media's coverage of the tragedy that hit the Young family.

Although much of the school did not find out about the disaster until the assembly on Thursday morning, several people had

heard a report on the radio. This report, after giving the basic information about the fire, stated that Matt had been pronounced "brain dead." Throughout the entire morning, this rumor circulated around the Upper School until many of us had accepted that falsehood as an awful fact. But, in advisory that day, we were all assured that this was incorrect. The School had been in touch with Sinai, where Matt had been taken, and had been given different information.

I was stunned. How could the news inaccurately report something so serious? It is one thing to be wrong about a date or a number, but it's inexcusable to broadcast unverified information of this magnitude about a cherished member of a community. But the media inaccuracies did not end with that first report. Sometime during Thursday afternoon, a local television station reported that Matt had died. This was then cop-

ied onto their website whereupon every other local news source in Baltimore (including the *Baltimore Sun* where Matt's dad works) copied the story to their own websites. My friends and I read this, and were absolutely devastated.

But this wasn't true, Matt hadn't died that day. The reporter for the local television station may have misunderstood a source at the hospital. At any rate, the station clearly did not make any efforts to confirm the tip, as is standard protocol, and instead reported that they had "breaking news."

Why wasn't this very serious fallacy verified by either that first station or any of the news sources that picked up the story? It is because the news industry has deteriorated from a reliable source of facts to runners in a race to present maybe-truths. Instead of taking the time to insure that their websites and newscasts keep the audience well informed, the media has be-

come solely about scooping competitors.

This current state of affairs is the fault of blogs and other web-based semi-professional news sources. For the sake of minute-to-minute updates, the public has taken an interest in getting its news from websites which answer to no principles for truth. To compete, the legitimate news agencies have had to adopt

a similar presence online, lowering their standards to near-blog level. This needs to change. The horrendous reporting done by the Baltimore news sources caused unnecessary emotional hardship on our community. So write a letter to a local news station; tell them you would like a little more truth with your evening newscast. News stations need to know that their false reports do not go unnoticed just because they pretend as though they never made a mistake. The local news station removed the inaccurate story about Matt's death from its website on Thursday, but no apology or retraction was ever made.



Activities step up to honor Matt Young

by *Sara Lever '09*

Matt Young was a prime example of the perfect Park School student and of the philosophy the school embodies. Matt was not only fully immersed within Park's academics, but he engaged himself completely in the community.

Matt took leading roles in clubs, activities, and sports. In the past week, as the school has been dealing with the Young tragedy, many activities, clubs, and sports teams have been thinking of ways to give back to Matt and his family, just as much as he gave to our school.

This tragedy had a huge effect on the entire community, not just those who worked closest to him. Activities and clubs that he was not involved in are also doing their best to honor Matt in the most meaningful ways. For Friday night's Boys' Varsity Basketball game, the members of the team wore black stripes on the shoulders of their uniforms in remembrance of Matt. The stripes will be worn for the rest of the season. Boys' Lacrosse will also be retiring Matt's number, 18 for the upcoming spring season.

Throughout his career at Park, Matt was involved in Model UN, *Postscript*, and Student Diversity Leadership. He also played soccer, lacrosse, squash, and ran cross-country. Matt put lots of time, work, and energy into these activities.



photo courtesy A. Kinslow '08

Committed to issues of diversity at Park, Matt (far right) attended last year's Student Diversity Leadership Conference in Seattle.

Goldsoundz raised over \$375 from ticket sales on December 7 and donated the money to The Matthew Young Fund for Upper School Students. The fund will provide instruments and music lessons to children who cannot afford them.

An accomplished cellist, Matt performed with groups at Park and for the Greater Baltimore Youth Orchestra. To honor his involvement, the annual winter concert December 19 will be dedicated to Matt.

In school, Matt was an active participant in Model UN. He helped to arrange this year's trip to William and Mary College in Williamsburg, Virginia, where he got to spend time with his sister Carrie '07 who is a freshman at the college. To do something special in Matt's honor, Model

UN members have been selling candy. Some of the money raised may go towards bringing a speaker to Park in Matt's honor or may be donated to the family.

Given the close connection of the Young family to *Postscript*, the newspaper is dedicating this issue to parents Nancy and Steve, and Matt's sisters Laura '03 and Carrie '07 in honor of Matt and Abby. Both Laura and Carrie had significant roles on the paper, and Matt was a talented and valuable writer.

These are just the first responses to the Young tragedy. More groups and activities are working on ways in which they can remember Matt and everything that he offered.

Other funds to honor Matt and Abby listed on the school's website.



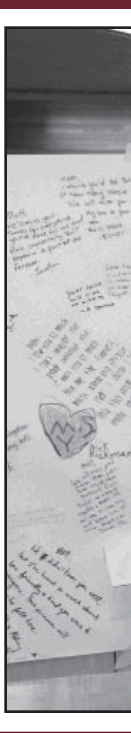
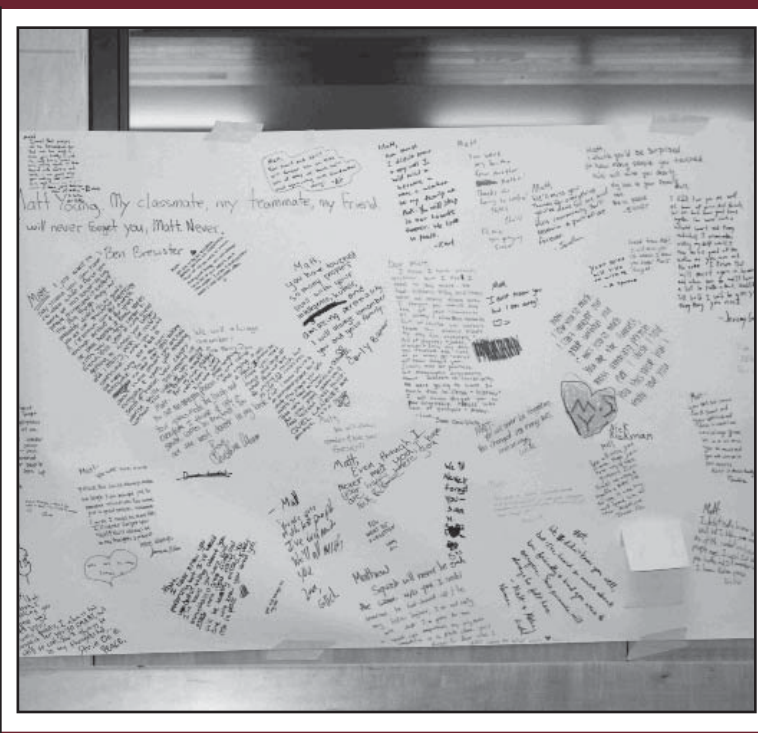
photo courtesy Brownie

The Boys' Lacrosse team, for which Matt played defense, will retire his jersey number, 18.



photo courtesy Brownie

Matt (bottom right) was a new member of the Boys' Cross Country team. Coach Paul Hulleberg said that Matt was not afraid of hard work and was on his way to becoming a solid runner.



Messages to Matt and his family color a banner posted in the Upper School Commons. Some of these notes appear below.

AN OUTPOURING OF LOVE AND GRIEF FOR

Matt



by Christine Tillman

The World's Reaction to December 8, 2007

IT RAINED THAT DAY:
THE DAY IT ALL FELL
APART.
AND I THOUGHT TO
MYSELF,
THE EARTH IS CRYING.

THE EARTH IS CRYING.
AS THE TEARS POUR
DOWN,
OUR WORLD MOURNS
FOR A TERRIBLE LOSS:
A SMART, FUNNY, NICE
GUY
IS NO LONGER WITH
US.

THE EARTH IS CRYING
BECAUSE IT SEEMS AS
THOUGH NOTHING
WILL EVER BE THE
SAME WITHOUT HIM.
MATT YOUNG
HAS LEFT US SO
MUCH,
EVEN THOUGH IT'S
SOMETIMES HARD TO
SEE.

THE EARTH IS CRYING.
WE ARE CRYING.
MOURNING FOR A
LOSS
THAT SHATTERS OUR
WORLD.

THE EARTH IS CRYING
WHEN IT RAINS.

IT RAINED THAT DAY.

--SUZY YASTER '10

All I could think of today was
we went sledding together.
When I got hurt you were the
one who helped me out and
back on my feet. I miss you
you're a great kid.

--Car

Abby was always there for me if I didn't
make a lacrosse goal or congratulating
me if I made a goal. She was always
happy and smiling.

I remember when we were going to
high-five each other. We missed, then
we tripped on each others' lacrosse
sticks but when we got up, we just
laughed uncontrollably.

I just want to say that Abby was a great
friend.

--Korby Simpson, Bryn Mawr

Here's to an amazing kid
who loved his family and
friends more than anyone I
have known. We love you
Matt, RIP

--Scotty

"...We are all too familiar with
the impact such a tragedy has
on a close knit community,
especially the students. Should
Boys' Latin be able to assist
in any way, counseling or
otherwise, please let us know

--Note from H. Meban

Turner, Headmaster, The Boy
Latin School of Maryland

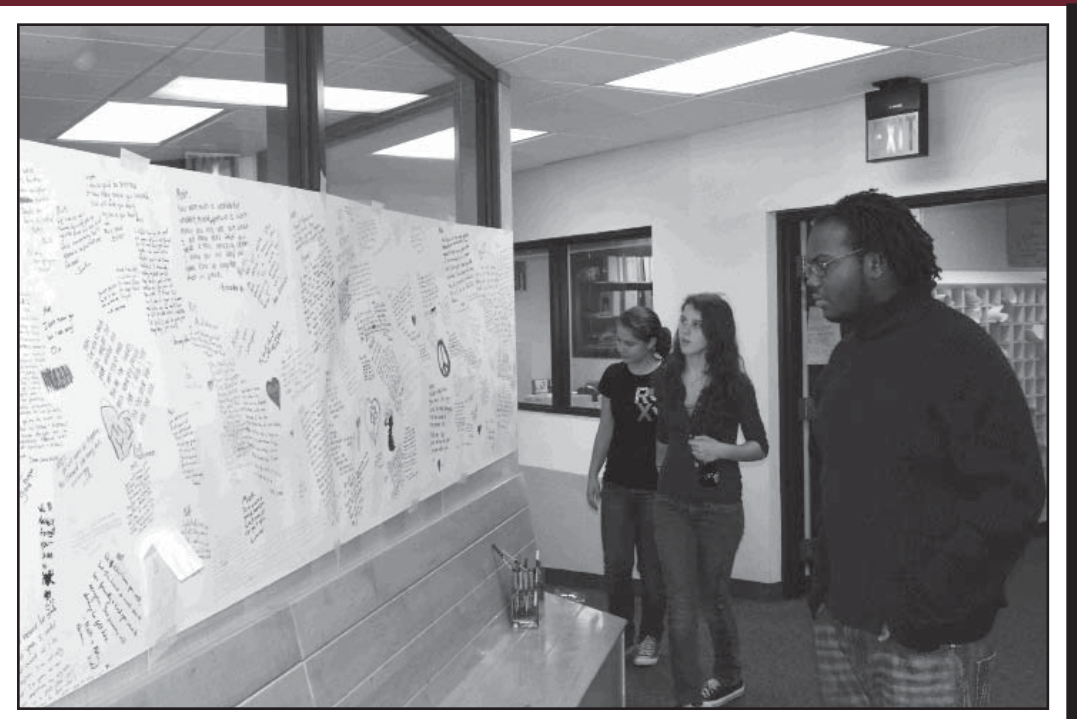
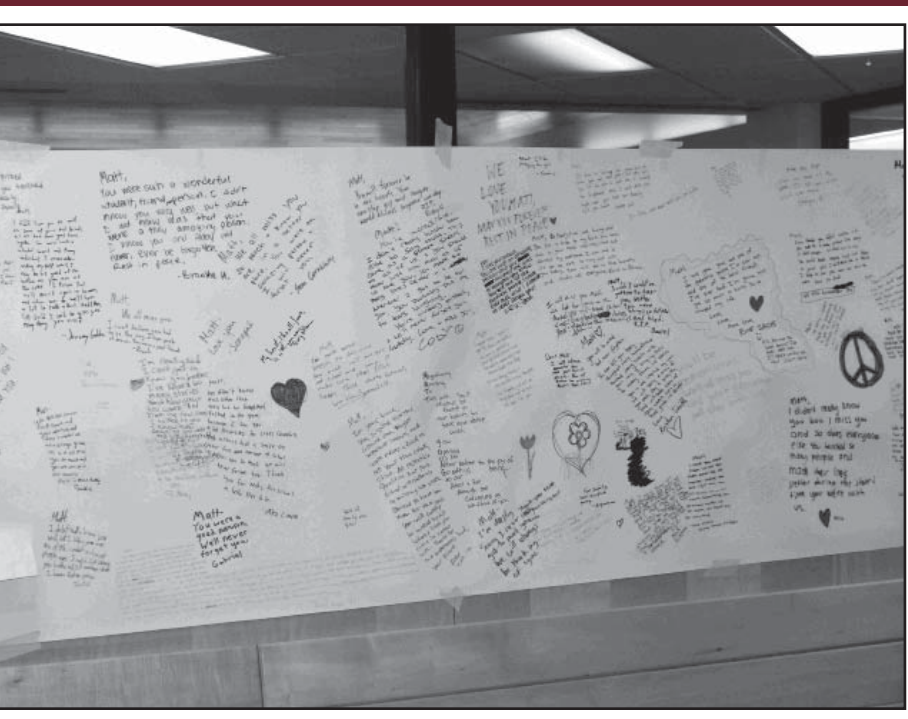
"...Our hearts go out to you,
your students and faculty,
and especially to the family
and friends of the Youngs....
We will keep you and the Park
School community in our
prayers as you tend to those
who are hurting."

--Letter from Old St.

Paul's, Cathedral Street,
downtown Baltimore, The Rev.
Mary Luck Stanley

Abby a
whene
She alw
her hou
friend.
really m
--Sophi

Abby was a beast at field hoc
Abby always had something to
--Rachel Park, Bryn Mawr



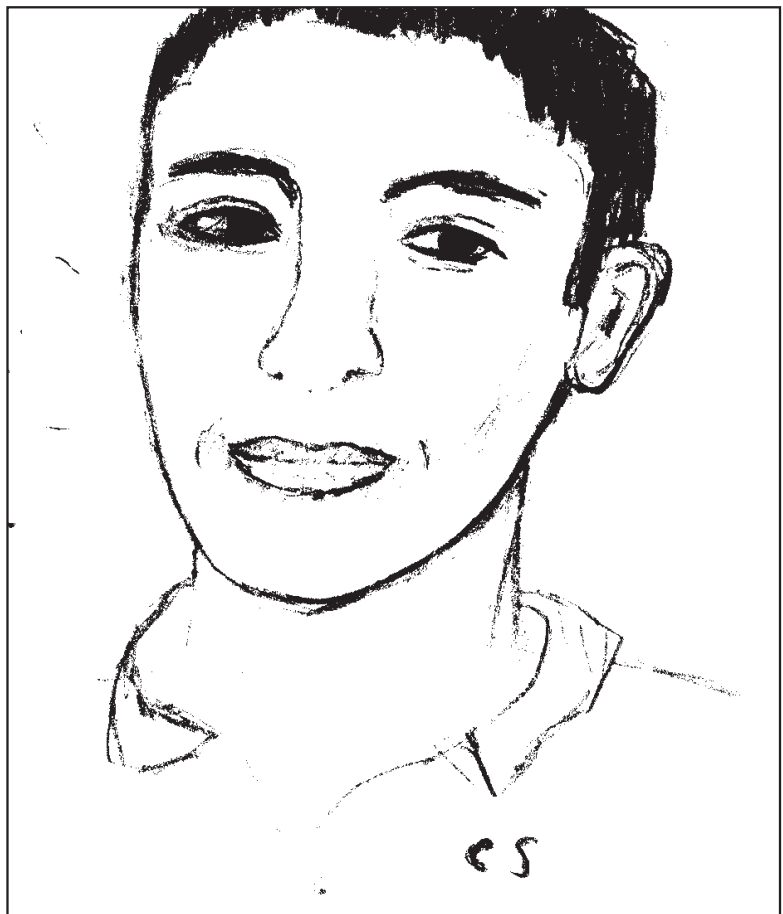
photos by A. Patel '08

low, along with other contributions from Matt's classmates and friends of Abby's who attend Bryn Mawr.

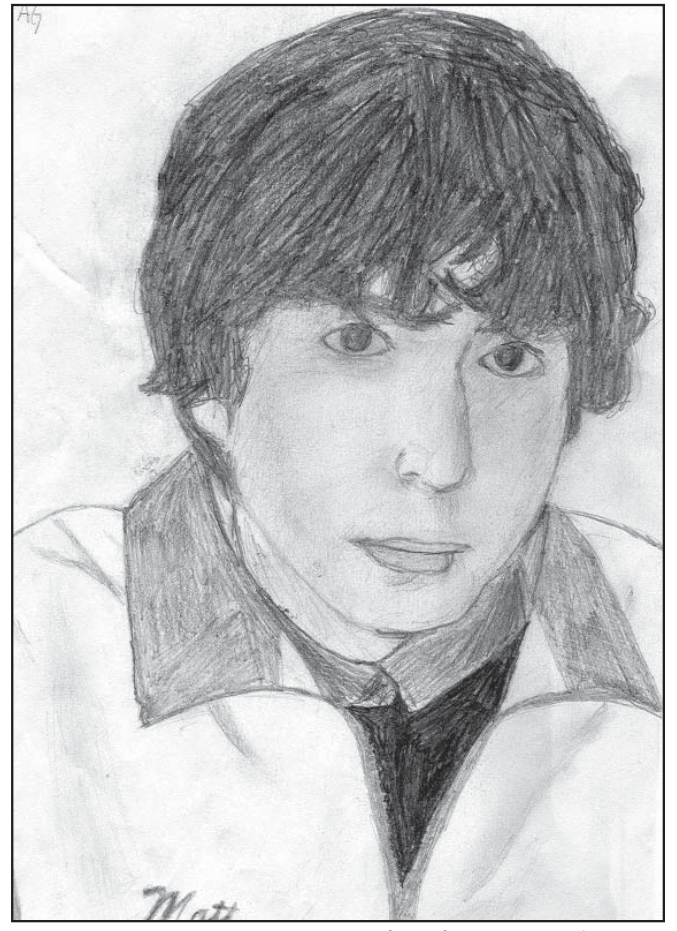
Matt and Abby

Always made me laugh
ever I was sad or just bored.
ways invited me over to
use whenever I needed a
I love her so much, and
miss her.
Freeman, Bryn Mawr

key, and so fun to talk to.
to make me laugh about.



by Jack Patterson '10



by Alex Gresov '10

Matt played soccer in 9th grade. At the urging of Lucas he gave cross country a try this year. Even with his addition, this fall's team was the smallest ever, only nine guys. It was also the most cohesive team I've ever coached. I really had the strongest sense that every guy truly liked every other guy on the team.

Every practice was upbeat and positive. I can't remember one when we didn't have at least one great laugh together. Needless to say, Matt fit in right away and was an integral part of this ethos. He had an incredible wit. He could be relatively quiet for several practices in a row, and then he'd have everyone in stitches with a spontaneous one-liner.

He was incredibly consistent in his approach to his new sport and was not afraid of hard work. By the end of the season it was becoming more and more clear to John (Kessinger) and me that he was on his way to being a solid and maybe even very good runner by the end of his high school career.

--Paul Hulleberg

*Flower of Youth,
a beautiful thing.
A boy on a hill,
standing high.
A candle snuffed out
that was once shining
bright.
Life turns to Death
Day into Night
We Will Never Forget.*

--Jesse Orr '11

Matt,
Although you have passed on,
your legacy will still remain. You
have already made an enormous
impact on the school in only a
little over a year. I hope you still
realize how important you were
to this community. You are alive
in all of our hearts. I love you.
RIP.
--Kyle

SPECIAL ISSUE

The Postscript | December 20, 2007

Mary Abigail Young and Matthew Sam Young

Matt's and Abby's older sisters Laura '03 and Carrie '07 spoke at Saturday's service, and have generously agreed to allow Postscript to print their entire speech.

Laura:

It's hard to be up here because we've got a pretty daunting task. We owe it to everyone here, to everyone who wasn't lucky enough to get to grow up with Matt and Abby, to help you remember them how we remember them.

Carrie:

Matt and Abby meant more to us than we could ever explain. They weren't just our little brother and sister – they were our playmates, our secret keepers, our sidekicks. From singing and acting out "No Other Day" from *Rent* on a boathouse during spring vacation last year, to staging pictures for Matt's newest Facebook album in Shenandoah, to watching *The Simpsons* all night long – we found fun in everything. When we were together we were almost different people. We felt freer to be goofy, stupid,

wild – to be ourselves.

Laura:

Everyone always pairs me and Matt. Abby and Carrie are the bubbly ones, and Matt and I are the focused, competitive ones who tell random facts. It's easy to get across how accomplished Matt was. He memorized the page turns of *Sammy the Seal* when he was three to make everyone believe he could read. Then he got mad at my Dad a few months later when he could read and we thought he was memorizing again. Everyone knows Matt is smart, including Matthew. But his intelligence was more than just academic. He watched the world and understood it in a way most of us cannot.

He was always steps ahead of everyone else, in his humor, his observations, but most importantly, his intuitive sense of the feelings and needs of others. My parents are rightfully proud of the time that Matthew won a writing contest and donated the prize to the Memorial Fund of a friend's little brother. But mostly what they love is the question Matt



asked my Dad: he wanted to know if he donated the prize, would it help his friend's parents feel a little better? Donating the prize was Matt's way of attempting to express the inexpressible. And that kind of compassion was completely natural for him, just like it was natural for him when I was a grumpy teenager to sleep on a mattress on the floor in my room and keep me awake asking random questions and telling silly facts.

Carrie:

Everyone always paired Abby and me together. We share the same curly hair, chubby cheeks and affinity for camp songs. We're easy going and cheerful, and for us, going a day without a smile is as bad as going a day without air. This fall, she started stealing my clothes, playing goalie in field hockey, and having her own insecurities about not living up to the accomplishments of her older siblings. What she didn't understand was that even though we were the older kids, we learned more from Abby everyday than we could have ever taught her.

Abby was, above all, her own person. She was a free spirit. Laura, Matt

and I knew the rules and followed them. Abby knew the rules but used her discretion to decide which ones were worth following. Nowhere did this shine through as much as at Calvert. From Abby's first admissions interview, Calvert must have known they were in for a Young much different than the ones they'd grown to know and love. When the admissions lady asked Abby if she could find her nose, Abby paused, looked at her, pointed to her nose, got up from her chair and turned away muttering, "That's stupid." And you

and sing songs she didn't understand, and then we loved to laugh at her for it. Once, Carrie, Matt and I thought it would be fun to force Abby to choose her favorite sibling. We sat around her, with our arms outstretched, encouraging her to walk over and hug the one of us she loved best. She smiled at us, with that knowing smirk everyone keeps talking about, and then she walked away from us and hugged ... the TV. The joke was on us.

Abby learned very quickly how to hold her own as



know what, it was. Abby had known where her nose was for years.

Laura:

Abby was always a good sport with us. When she was younger, we loved to make her quote movies

the youngest of four kids. We loved Abby's hugs. Abby loved a lot, and she loved everybody. My dad always said she was the smartest out of all us. My mom always says she's the only one of us who figured out that the best way to
(Continued next page)

SPECIAL ISSUE

The Postscript | December 20, 2007

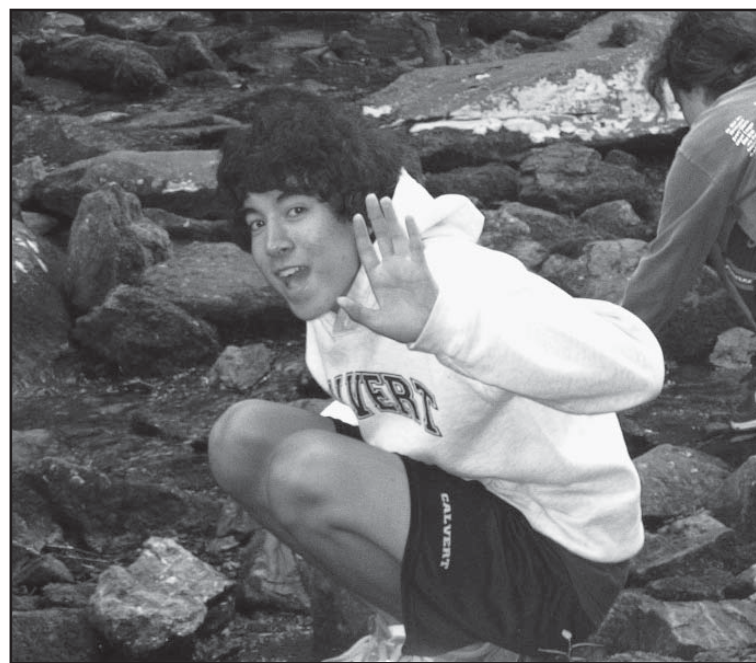
Family remarks from Memorial, December 15

(Cont'd from prev. page)

get her way, or get out of trouble, is to give a hug. She definitely figured out something very key about love very early on—it overflows. She always remembered to let us know when we were loved. She was generous with her hugs. And she knew how to protect the ones she loved, whether it was, like her friend Alice's mom tells

We all know about Matt's perfect grades, but he was so much smarter than any transcript could ever reflect. One day in 8th grade Matt woke up and took the SAT's. I, on the other hand, prepped for eight months, took the test seven times and got the same score as a senior that Matt received when he was 14. And last year, he spent a G-Block proofreading my Literature

walking towards us. Then we walked/ran/stumbled away searching for an open gate. Once we found one, we sprinted away and went to brag to our sister about our little adventure. The next morning, when we were trying to boast about our mischievousness to our mom, we were informed that we had ripped off the signs she'd put up to save seats for our family.



Laura:

Carrie and I have never taken for granted that we come from a very special family. When I think of our whole family together, I always think of Christmas time. Christmas Eve, after we've written the note to Santa Claus, and left out the cookies, and negotiated with our parents the contract for what time we're allowed to wake up in the morning, we choose one of our rooms, and we all camp out together waiting for Christmas. And then after that one night of anticipation, it's usually hard for us to go back to sleeping on our own, so we have to spend the next few days continuing the sleepover. My grandmother

likes to talk about how whenever the kids take a photo together, we're always touching. We can't let go of each other.

We can't capture Matt and Abby in this short talk about them, but it's our job from now on to live our

lives as a tribute to them. They know how much we love them, and they love us. And we know they're watching us. Matt's smiling but he's nervous for us, and he's holding on to Abby because she's peeking out from behind him and giggling at us.



us, telling Alice she would punch anyone who hurt her, or the random calls she made to all of us asking us what we were doing, or when we were coming home, or when we were getting a new cell phone so she could get her own. You think she's just bored or being silly, and she's reminding us in the Abby way that she loves us.

Carrie:

Matt got me through Upper School. Whenever I'd have problems with my friends or was stressed out from school and applying to colleges I could always count on him to stay home and order Chinese food and watch *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* with me. The thing is, even when I was out at a party or something with my friends, I'd still kind of wish I was home watching TV with my little brother – because, with Matt, even the simplest, most boring sounding nights could turn out to be so much fun.

of Modern War portfolio, which, after Matt's critique, received an A. You'd think it might be annoying to have a little brother who's more academically inclined than you. But with Matt it was just the opposite. He was humble and mature about his gifts and I was nothing but proud. We had that kind of brother/sister relationship where it didn't matter who the older one was, we were both equal. We had different strengths and we embraced what we lacked in each other. Even though I was the older sister, neither of us was the leader. We were each other's sidekicks.

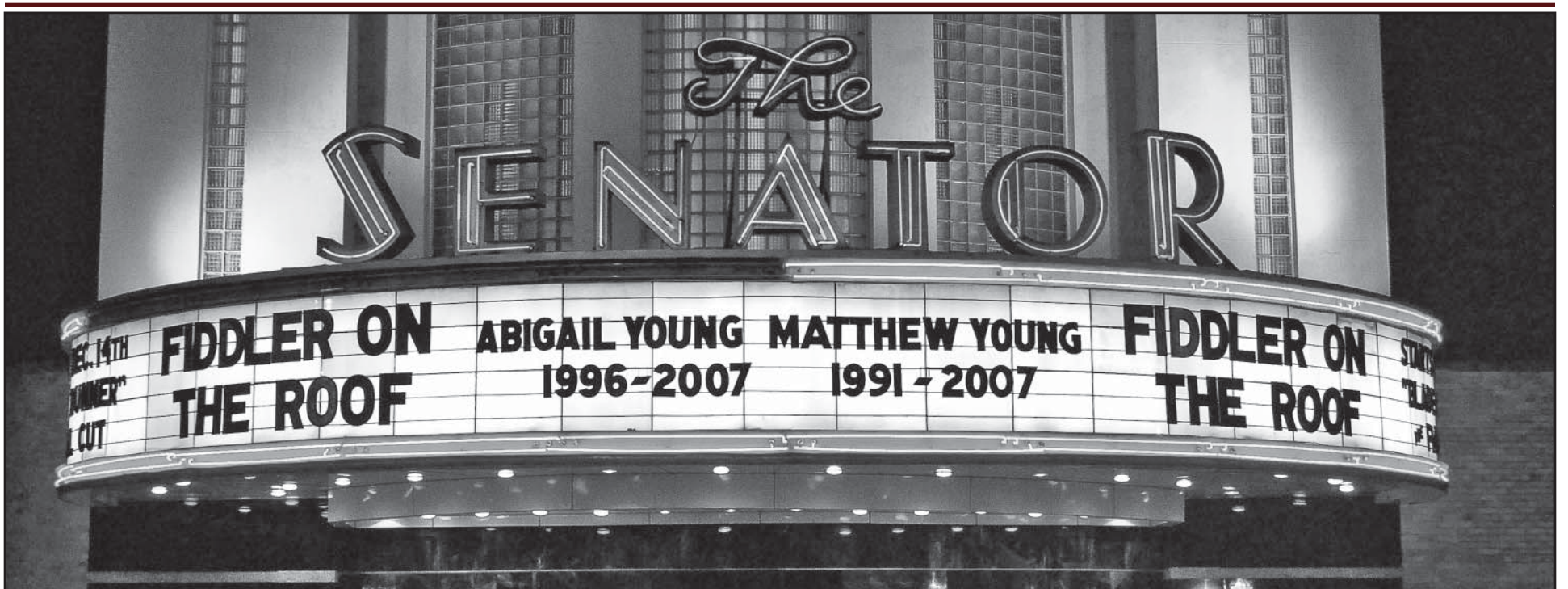
Last May, the night before Laura's graduation we were wandering Yale's Old Campus when we noticed that a number of the chairs had homemade signs on them, saving them for families. As the enforcers of equality we were, we decided to rip off the signs and proceeded to do so, until we spotted a campus police officer



Abby, Carrie, Laura, and Matt Young at Laura's Graduation from Yale University last May.

SPECIAL ISSUE

The Postscript | December 20, 2007



A Meditation for December 10, 2007

Christopher Leighton, a Park parent, and Executive Director of the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies, addressed the Upper School at a special assembly Monday, December 10.

by Christopher M. Leighton

We are sometimes knocked off our feet and hurled into desperate circumstances. A disaster catches us totally unprepared, and we cannot distinguish up from down or separate the inside from the out. There are no magic words to dispel this darkness. No incantations to dissolve the ache and the emptiness. Theologians who can unravel the deepest tangles of ancient doctrines and can even count the number of angels on the head of a pin are reduced to stammering and stuttering. And this is where the death of Matt and Abby Young leaves us. Stumbling, bumbling, straining to get through the numbing fog of a dreadful loss. We are bound together in the whirlwind. Dazed and disoriented, we sit together, hobbled and uncertain what we can say or do that might make some difference.

I suspect some of us find that every offer of consolation rings hollow or false. I have found that the promise of pie in the sky fails to relieve the grumbling in the stomach. The bottomless pit of grief is not sated with promises of otherworldly rewards. The bumper sticker tells the story: crap happens. We get

caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, and the center does not hold. Life gets snuffed out, and there is no rhyme or reason to explain it. There is no meaning in such a loss. It makes no sense. In the words that Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Macbeth: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player who struts and frets his hour upon the stage and is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

We are not the first to confront such a confounding disaster, and we won't be the last. Whether we are adherents of a religious tradition or not, we stand in a long procession of peoples who have faced catastrophe. We belong to communities that have struggled to find a path through the shadows in the valley of death. Buddhists have their path, and Hindus theirs. Jews, Christians and Muslims each have their own way of grieving, their rituals of mourning, and their practices of contending with the void. But all of these religious traditions insist that we do not recover from the disruption of death on our own. We find our way only when we recover a sense of connection that links the living with the dead.

So if you take the time and effort to dig into our religious traditions, you find that there are many ways in which people combat the forces of chaos and struggle to re-instate order in the midst of destruction. In these circumstances, prayer is an act of resistance, a rebellion against the onslaught of despair, a refusal to yield the last word to death. Each tradition mounts its own campaign to battle cynicism and disillusionment, but every

community insists that there is work to do in the face of tragedy. Heavy lifting is required to make certain that Matt and Abby are firmly anchored among the living, and that their family and friends are nourished with tuna casseroles and briskets, and that in the days ahead they are wrapped in the caring embrace of all those who knew Matt and Abby.

When I was in the tenth grade and was walloped by the death of one of my closest friends, I stood uneasily within my religious tradition. All the pious proclamations left me cold and bitter. I had friends who found solace in Psalm 23. They were grounded in a confidence that God's presence endures, that we can trust the Almighty, that we will never be abandoned, that goodness will prevail, and that we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. I knew that I was supposed to feel certain things, and yet I didn't.

Everyone around me seemed to take the measure of the catastrophe and to register an appropriate sadness. And yet I buckled under the weight of the shock and felt mostly numb. I wanted to be alone, and at the same time I wanted to be with my friends. I struggled to navigate a coherent path and had to chart my course using a more ferocious constellation of emotions—recognized and affirmed in Psalm 88, a psalm of lament that rages against the night, that fearlessly screams its protest, demanding God to wake up and smell the coffee. "God, you plunged me into the bottom of the pit, into the darkness of the abyss. Your anger lies heavy upon me; all your waves crash over me... Why hide your face from me? Your terrors have reduced me to silence." And then the psalm concludes without flinching, "My only friend is darkness."

What I did not appreciate then is that both the Jewish and Christian traditions make room for a wide-open spectrum of thoughts and feelings—from rage to resignation, from despair to hope—and all the turbulence can be channeled into a lament or a cry of dereliction. And yet, our traditions do not rest in prayer or hold the contemplation of the mystery as the end of grief. There

is a duty that comes with our mourning for Matt and Abby, a primal imperative to move through the whirlwind of our thoughts and feelings. Simply stated the dead have a legitimate claim on the living.

The obligation is etched into an ancient midrash within the Jewish tradition. The story goes that Moses could not escape the slavery of Egypt and find a way to the Promised Land without first doing something of crucial importance. He had to find the tomb where the Patriarch Joseph was buried, dig up Joseph's bones, and take them with him. The midrash suggests that if Moses failed to find and carry the remains of Joseph, he never could have led his people to freedom. Why? Because a community has no future without a past. A people cannot build a home for the living unless they recognize their indebtedness to those who are dead. As it turns out, an individual is fragile and his presence is transient unless that individual belongs to a community, and the community is shallow and destined to wander in the wilderness if it fails to recognize that the line separating the living from the dead is permeable, porous. The past and the future overlap; they are intertwined.

Which is another way of saying that we belong to each other. That we each count, that we are finite creatures of infinite import, and that no one can be left behind. You will be a community to the extent that you carry Matt and his family with you in the years to come. The tenth grade has intuited this connection, and you have begun the work. There is more ahead of you. But the wisdom of our traditions suggests that you cannot carve a trail through the wilderness without carrying Matt and his family with you. There is no future if you settle in the land of forgetfulness. The content and character of your community will be shaped by the way that you honor Matt, by making sure that you care for one another, crossing the boundaries of class cliques and being there for one another. The legacy becomes living when you cherish the fragile gift of life and never take one another or your families for granted.

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