

## Eulogy for Brian Thomas Ward

Good morning. My name is Jordan Tippett, and I am Uncle Brian's niece, which you probably surmised, since I just referred to him as Uncle Brian. I am here today to deliver a tribute to my Uncle. But I also stand before you as a representative for the family. In that regard, you may hear me alternate between his various monikers: Brian, Uncle Brian...and U.B. When my father died last year, Uncle Brian stepped into his shoes and was – by everyone's standards – a father. I was so grateful. Somehow Uncle Brian seemed to easily fill this familial role. So, with the movie, Uncle Buck, in mind, we began to lovingly call him, U.B.

I'm here for Aunt Amy, who knows Brian as her devoted husband. I am here for Tyler, Tony and AnnaMarie, who know and love him as their father. I'm also representing Brian's Mother, Gloria; his brothers, Jim and Bruce; his sisters -in-law, Sarah, Bobbi, Jennifer and Mary, along with his numerous nieces and nephews.

I would like to thank all of you who made your way through the snow and ice to be with us today. Your love, friendship and support have been critical and appreciated during this very difficult time – and we are forever grateful. Sharing in another's joy is easy, but sharing in the pain of grief and loss is a sign of true compassion. So, thank you.

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In the Jewish tradition, there is an ancient practice of placing stones on the burial site of a loved one. During the burial, the mourners choose small stones or rocks, and place them on top of the grave as a symbol. These stones symbolize strength. They symbolize legacy, and they symbolize longevity.

Yes, I said, “Longevity,” which at first blush seems counter-intuitive, and if you are less indulgent, you’re probably thinking that I am so devastated by Uncle’s death, that I should probably be medicated.

You would be right on the first count, for I am devastated...as we all are. But you would be wrong about the second impression. I’m not crazy, and I’m not delusional...and as far as medication goes, well, I am not sharing . . . so please allow me to make my case.

I chose this ancient imagery from the Jewish burial customs, because it is precise. In fact, it is a practice that is still in use today – not only for Jewish burials, but for Christian burials as well. The truth is, that it is so ubiquitous, that many other cultures and religions have adopted this popular custom. But that is only part of my reasoning. I also chose this tradition, because it offers a perfect metaphor for the man we know as, *Brian Ward*.

Brian was a rock, in almost every sense of the word. When I began to talk to family members and friends about my U.B., nearly everyone used terms like, “Steadfast; secure; unwavering; reliable and strong;” and indeed, he was all of these things. But, the human expression of someone who is a rock also includes descriptors like honest, trustworthy, loyal and even . . . heroic virtue. He was all of these things too.

Of course, these characteristics had to be instilled in the crucible of a nuclear family, where we are civilized and socialized into the people we were meant to be. The Ward brothers were no different. Brian and his brothers gained proficiency in the arts of resilience and conflict/resolution during their formative years in Rockville, Maryland. Brian was a natural in this sphere, as evidenced by his brother Bruce’s precipitous visits to the emergency room! (Although it should be noted that Bruce sent Brian to the emergency room as well!) And yet, this predictable and comfortable lifestyle also fostered the values of industry, compassion and determination.

Of course, the 'Brian Ward' family knew these lessons only too well. Amy recalled a time when they were in need of septic repair. Brian hired a Septic company to make those repairs. The workers toiled all day, digging numerous holes, cutting down tree branches and moving lawn structures. When the repair was completed, they appeared at the front door, expecting payment. Brian met them with a cool, steadfast attitude. "I'm sorry," he said. "I'm not paying you until you pick up the mess in the backyard." And he was right, of course. The backyard had been completely dismantled. As you might imagine, this news was not well-received, and Amy recalls watching the nearly 6 foot 5, 250 pound angry man yelling and gesturing – as he insisted on payment. For his part, Brian remained unaffected. In fact, he never raised his voice – choosing instead – to simply stand before the man: stone-faced and immovable. (There's that metaphor again). At some point the man realized he was up against an edifice, and he finally directed his crew to clean up the back yard. Only then, did they receive their payment. Brian had won the day. He was resolute, and determined, and everyone knows that once he has decided on a plan, he is undeterred.

My family experienced this determination in a kinder way.

My father passed away exactly one year ago. (So, we understand some of what Aunt Amy and my cousins Tyler, Tony and AnnaMarie are experiencing.) During the first few weeks after my father died, Uncle Brian appeared one morning on my Mother's doorstep. He was holding a six pack of beer in one hand, and his bag of tools in the other. Astonished, my mother asked him why he was there. U.B. smiled and said, "Just tell me what needs to be done in the house. Make me a list." He knew that my mother was unaccustomed to fending for herself in the worlds of mechanical engineering, and carpentry – and he had come to help. No one ever asked him; he just showed up to work, and would not take no for an answer. That was Brian: determined, loyal and reliable.

Brian was also a devoted father. Tony recalls a time, in the not-too distant-past, when he and his father repaired and restored an old canoe. Once they had rendered the canoe seaworthy, they made plans to launch it from an outpost of the Monocacy River. What they had not anticipated was the drought that year. As they began their journey, Tony recalls bumping and bouncing off the rocks that are normally hidden in deeper waters. They camped out as planned, and shared a lonely tree hammock (it was, after all far colder than either of them had anticipated). Although they had planned for another day, they returned home early...chagrined, sore and a little wiser about physical geography. But it was an important event for both of them as a father-son venture. For Tony, it provided a valuable blueprint for hard work, determination, and knowing when to pick up your toys and go home.

Amy and Brian also have a daughter, AnnaMarie. Being the only daughter, it became abundantly obvious that Brian treated her with a newfound tenderness. This was a radical departure for him – having grown up with brothers, and then fathering two sons...before his initiation into the world of “Girl-Dad.” To everyone’s surprise (except perhaps to Aunt Amy) Brian was a natural. AnnaMarie tells of a recent incident, when her father called her outside to teach her how to change the oil in the car. He was in his work clothes, but AnnaMarie was not. She was dressed in a pretty outfit (girls always describe their clothes as tops and outfits). He knew how important wardrobe is to a 16-year-old girl, and she told me about how he spent a great deal of time finding boxes that could be used as clothing protectors, before continuing the lesson. That was Brian too: compassionate.

Brian was also a worthy friend. Being part of a connected group, with similar interests was extremely important to him, and he always made sure that his friends and family were attended to in a way that only Brian could convey. Consider yourself blessed, if you were on his friend list. He never hesitated to offer assistance when asked, and we all knew that he could be

relied upon to help with the menial as well as substantial tasks. Brian was nothing, if not reliable.

This brings me back to the curious statement: that stones symbolize longevity. (I promised I would get to this. I saved it for the end, because it was the most important). The counter-intuitive quality of longevity, when referring to a stone, rock or boulder is – that stones last forever. Even if they are liquefied into molten lava, and re-formed...they will always be here, until the end of time. They are natural, tangible entities, that have something in common with the eternal...and that is why the stones indicate longevity...it is a reference to the longevity of the soul.

Brian's soul lives on. Through faith, he believed that. Through faith, we believe that. In his own, quiet, Brian-sort-of way, he possessed a powerful faith in His Creator, His Redeemer and His Church. I rarely heard him wax poetic about faith, but it was evident in the way he approached life. Allow me to offer you one last story.

About 10 years ago, he had a contract job in Annapolis. He executed the job as you might expect: skillfully, efficiently, and thoroughly. He was paid by check, which he promptly deposited, and then returned home. But, by the time he returned home, he discovered that the check he had received as payment...bounced. He called the people who wrote him the check, and they told him if he took them to small claims court, they would ruin his reputation. After a few days of ruminating, Brian called the people back and left them a message on their voicemail:

"I have decided that I will not sue you for non-payment," he said. "Instead, I've decided to have a Mass said for you. I think, more than anything, that is what you need."

When the rest of the family heard about this, we were awed by his generosity and capacity for mercy. He was a quiet man; a true rock – as I indicated at the beginning of this eulogy – in almost every sense of the word, but his soul had been transformed into living stone.

We know that the soul lives on, just like the stones that can never die. We know this through faith that there is something greater than ourselves. It is our faith that provides understanding in this valley of tears; and it is our faith that leads us back to God...which was the point all along.

My Uncle Brian is a living stone, now, shining and luminous before the Creator Himself – which (being the church lady that I am) reminds me of a scripture passage. So please humor me just a little bit longer:

The first letter of Peter says the following: *“Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”* 1 Peter 4-5

So you see, placing stones on a grave becomes wildly relevant in this context. Uncle Brian is a living stone, acceptable in the sight of the Father, who knows our hearts.

And the next time you pass a graveyard, take a moment to observe the number of “gravestones,” sitting upright on the cemetery lawn. They are a nod to the ancient Jewish tradition of placing “stones,” upon a grave, because stones are a symbol of eternity.

Godspeed UB, and pray for us, who have been left behind. You are now living in the miracle that has been promised to all...who believe.