A Way in the Desert: 
Tribute to Benjamin Bedel

An Honors Creative Project (HONRS 499)

by

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Purpose of Creative Project:

This discussion of the life and death of Benjamin A. Bedel focuses on his struggle with Ewingsarcoma and on his enduring faith throughout this trial. Its purpose is to demonstrate the impact this one adolescent boy made upon the people around him and to carry on the testimony of Jesus Christ, which shone so brilliantly through Benjamin’s life.

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My undying gratitude to my younger brother Benjamin who was the inspiration for this project. His unconditional love and unstoppable faith have left me truly amazed.

Most importantly, I need to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Without His sacrifice, none of this would matter. We are truly thankful that He loaned us such a special treasure as Benj even for a short time. He is truly continuing to make “a way in our desert.”

“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.”

--Isaiah 43:19
The baby's wail could be heard throughout the room. Everyone in the room tried to settle the child, and then a familiar voice said, "It's okay." The small baby stopped crying and looked around for the voice.

The person who influenced me the most was my mother. The story told was about me when I was born; at least that's the way it was told to me. My mother has influenced me since the day I was born.

My mother has taught my moral ethics. She has also taught me right from wrong since I was little. She taught me little things, like how to be nice to others, and also big things, like don't commit murder. Really, the little things add up to be the big, important things. My mother has also taught me to have a faith in God, a faith I hope to pass on to my children someday.

I hope that I may influence someone the way that my mother has influenced me, and then I could change the world in my own small way.

by Ben Bedel
As I pull into our driveway, I notice the police car and know immediately that something must be wrong with Benjamin. Only a couple of months from his seventeenth birthday, my younger brother has been battling cancer for a year now. (It has seemed much longer for all of us.) Last night, my parents took Benj on that all-too-familiar trip to Riley Hospital. He had been in so much pain that he was unable to get up from the couch without assistance.

The policeman confirms my fears. The county sheriff, a family friend has sent him, to get me to the hospital as soon as possible. On our way to Riley, his car phone rings. My dad tells me they don’t expect Benjamin to make it through the afternoon, but my little brother is holding on to say good-bye to me. It is a sunny, warm Saturday afternoon, but a cold, numb feeling comes over my body. My mind begins to wander back to a day that doesn’t seem that long ago when my life was changed forever by a very special addition to our family.

I was only five and a half when my grandmother answered the important phone call that day. She had been watching my three-year-old sister Erin and me while my parents were at the hospital. Grandma relayed the phone message to the two of us--Mom had a healthy little boy, and he would be named Benjamin Alan. I immediately began crying; I didn’t mind having a little brother, but I had hoped he would be named Cowboy Bob after a favorite television show.
My disappointment was transformed into pure joy when Mom and Dad brought home that wriggling little bundle. Even then, my baby brother was full of energy and quick to explore the world around him. I quickly grew to love this little guy with his beautiful smile and love of life. It didn’t take long for me to develop a motherly attitude toward Benj. As a toddler, he started calling me his “biggie sissy,” and he was my “baby bubbie.” He, my sister, and I were fiercely protective of each other. I remember one instance when I was yelling at someone for picking on Benjamin. Benj was only in kindergarten, and the kid who had been picking on him was a year older than I was. I stepped between them. When I had finished, I heard a small but indignant voice behind me say, “And you’d better listen to her, or I’ll color on you!” It was the worst threat his young, innocent mind could think to say.

Benjamin always drank in life with such enthusiasm. When he was about two, our family had a vegetable garden in the backyard. Benjamin loved to “help” with the tomatoes. He would come out with his little tin pail to pick them with us, but he would end up eating them straight from the vine. Before we were finished, Benj would have bits
of tomato all over his face, the juice running over his chin, down his belly, into his diaper.

As usual, he would have a huge grin on his face.
As the police car pulls up to the emergency room doors, I feel a huge knot tightening in my stomach. I would never have imagined there would be an occasion on which I wouldn’t be delighted for a chance to spend time with my little bub. (At 6'1", Benjamin thinks it’s funny that I still refer to him as “little.”)

I take the quickest route up to the cancer unit and my heart is pounding all the way. A million questions race through my head. Will Benjamin still be there? What will I say to him? Why is this happening to us? Over all of the questions, my soul is crying out, “I don’t want to lose my baby brother!”

When I get to the fifth floor, a receptionist points the way to Benjamin’s room. As I approach his door, I see a large group of friends and family. Many of them have crowded into the room; still others are standing in the hall. They make a path for me to get through to my little brother’s bed. My fiancé Shane, who has followed the police car all the way to the hospital, walks in right behind me.

Benjamin is lying there amidst tube and wires and wearing an oxygen mask. My sister wakes him up to talk to me. As our eyes meet, I begin to cry, and he tries to comfort me. I tell him how much I love him and how very proud of him I am. He tells me he loves me too and takes off his oxygen mask to give me a kiss. I hug him, and he asks for another kiss. Benj gestures to Shane to bend closer and gives him a kiss on the cheek. Then, Benjamin takes one of Shane’s hands and one of mine, looks at us for a moment, and says, “May the Lord bless your marriage all the days of your lives.”

As Benjamin hugs others in the room, I can’t help thinking about what he said. I know the wedding will be a difficult day for all of us now. Benj has been looking forward to it almost as much as I have. When Shane and I get into a little spat, Benj will
tease, “Now kids, let’s not call off the wedding. I want to wear that tux.” I know there’s more to it than that, though. Shane has become like a big brother to Benj. (Actually, he was the first one to refer to my little brother as Benj. Benjamin liked it so much that it stuck.)

I had been looking forward to dancing with Benjamin at the reception. He and I like to pretend we know how to ballroom dance. In fact, he has always liked dancing. As a kid, he wore out any Fred Astaire movies he could get. At a wedding reception when he was about eight, Benj danced the entire night. On the way home, he told Mom, “I had the best time ever, ever, ever.” More recently, he and Erin have enjoyed making up comedy dance routines to their favorite songs. All of these have earned the nickname Bojangles for him (Bo for short) from a song about a “dancing man” by that name.
Beyond the wedding, there were so many other hopes and dreams I had for Benjamin’s life. I had been so excited that my future children were going to have such a terrific uncle. I was even more anxious to see Benj with his own children and wife. He had ambitions to go to nursing school, so he could help others in his situation. He would have been a good father, husband, nurse, and whatever else he set his mind to do. Benj always tries so hard to keep us from the "what ifs," but sometimes I can’t seem to stop myself.
Benjamin has now drifted into a deep sleep. I wonder if this was my last opportunity here on Earth to hear my little brother’s strong, reassuring voice and see his sweet, genuine smile. Was that the last time on this side of Heaven’s gates when I would be able to tell him how much he means to me...to all of us? There were so many other things I could have said. More of those troubling “what ifs” begin to attack my mind. Benj would not be pleased to know I’m doing this, so I need to pull myself together.

I hear my parents telling the story of the long, hard morning to some people. Mom is saying that they knew it wasn’t good when the doctors took so awfully long to come back and talk with them. Dad says they showed them the MRIs--the remaining tumor in his lungs, as well as the one in his brain, had not only survived the arduous pinpoint radiation, but had actually grown. One of his lungs was almost completely filled with fluid. The doctors told my parents they could try to drain his lungs, but they would fill again quickly. If they could keep his lungs drained, they could try a new chemo drug. Benjamin had already undergone the most aggressive protocol of chemotherapy available, though, so it was doubtful that this weaker drug would be effective. Also, his body had already been through so many difficult things that chemo would probably just kill him slowly and painfully. There was really nothing left for the doctors to do.

Now Mom begins the hardest part of the story. My parents had to break the news to Benjamin as gently as possible. When they walked into the room, Benjamin was explaining his plans for prom to some friends of ours. These people slipped out of the room when they saw the expressions on our parents’ faces. Benj listened as Mom and Dad explained what the doctors had said. When they were finished, he asked, “You mean
I’m going to die?” Mom tells us she could only nod her head, and Benjamin let out a mournful cry.

Dad reassures us that this cry lasted less than a minute. Benjamin immediately turned to hug our pastor at that point. He looked at Mom and said, “I know you won’t want to hear this, but I need to plan my funeral.” The boy who had been planning for his first prom only moments before was now planning for his death. He planned almost all the details of his burial and funeral services. He told them that he wanted all of the money in his savings account to go to our church, and he named a few possessions and who should receive them.

Next, Dad tells us how Benj’s deepest desire is for people to come to know Jesus through his funeral services. That’s so typical of my little brother. He is prepared to meet death with the same grace with which he has faced his many struggles during his year-long battle against this horrible disease. The war that cancer has waged against his body has certainly not tarnished his spirit. In fact, it has drawn Benjamin closer to his Lord, sharpened his focus, and sweetened an already beautiful soul. I have never been more proud of my “baby bubbie” than I am right at this moment.
After nearly an hour and a half of silence from Benjamin’s bed, other than the horrible gasping, choking noises as he struggles to breathe past the rapidly building fluid, I have steadily grown more certain that my little brother will not remain much longer in this world. I can see from the faces around the room that others are thinking the same thing.

My parents have told the story of their difficult decision many times. By now, I have heard a few more details. After planning his funeral, Benj had wanted to go home. He knew he didn’t have a lot of time left in his physical body, so he wanted to make good use of that time. He said that he had people he needed to introduce to the Savior, and he also wanted to go to church one last time. My parents had been making arrangements to take him home, but he had started fading far too quickly.

As the story is being retold for what seems like the hundredth time, Benjamin begins to cough and wakes himself. As he reaches for the suction tool, Benj chuckles to himself. Mom smiles for the first time in several hours and asks why he is laughing. Benj says with another chuckle and a nod toward all the people crammed into the hospital room, “I’m laughing at all of you watching me spit.” The entire room bursts into laughter. A feeling of relief comes over me. It feels so good to hear Benjamin joking and laughing again.

Between the pain medication and the carbon dioxide, which is steadily building in his system, Benj has to fight to stay awake. I ask if he wants to go to sleep or if he would like me to help him stay awake. He says he wants to stay awake, so every time he starts to nod off I nudge him and say his name. After five or six times, though, he starts to get a little annoyed and asks me to back away from him. Then he apologizes immediately.
By this time, Benj has the whole room laughing uncontrollably with his teasing remarks (aimed mostly at himself). I have to fight to remind myself that this could quite possibly be the last time to enjoy Benjamin’s company. He is so alert and full of life. The crackling, gurgling sounds that come with each breath he takes foreshadow the loss each of us is dreading and keep us from forgetting the severity of the situation.

Suddenly, Benjamin looks at Mom and asks what is taking so long and when we are going home. She assures him that we will go if that’s what he really wants, but she also lets him know that she’s afraid he wouldn’t survive the ride. Plus, he would not have the constant IV of pain medicine. She finally says that she just doesn’t know what we should do. Benjamin looks at her and immediately says, “Well, then let’s pray about it.” As soon as we are finished praying, he says, “I think I’d better stay.”

I think about what a normal response that was for Benjamin. When faced with a tough decision or difficult moment in his life, Benj has always known where to turn. He was only about eight when he decided to give his life to Christ, and he has had such a complete trust in his Heavenly Father ever since.

I remember a time not long after this decision when Benjamin came into the kitchen with us after spending quite some time alone in his bedroom. He told us that he had asked God if He ever sleeps, and God had assured him that He never does. Grandma took Benj to Scripture to reaffirm that this is true. “He will not let your foot slip--He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep (Psalm 121:3,4).”

While Benjamin was struggling through the horrible side effects of chemotherapy, he would often have us read things from the Bible to encourage him. Once, after Mom
had finished reading from the book of Daniel, Benjamin said, "See? Daniel went through a lot of tough trials, too, but he always trusted God." It's been hard for any of us to have a bad attitude when Benj was always keeping such a great outlook.

After about half an hour of talking and joking, the carbon dioxide is taking its toll on Benjamin. He lays back and goes to sleep and will not be woken except for a few small intervals of time. He uses a few of these times to witness to the ones he loves. He asks those about whose salvation he is uncertain, "Do you know Jesus as your personal Savior?" I'm told that this has happened several times throughout the day. Benjamin is certain about where he will be going shortly. He wants to make sure that the ones he loves will be joining him there. Suddenly, there is silence once again. The time we were given was so certainly a gift from God, but I can't help feeling sad that it passed so quickly.
It's been nearly two hours since Benjamin last responded to anyone. After listening to his only son struggling for every breath over such a long period of time, Dad's resolve is beginning to fade. He knows he can still reverse his decision. Maybe, if the doctors drained Benj's lungs, we could keep him with us for just a little while longer.

Dad keeps asking each of us what we want him to do. I don't want to sway him for fear that he won't make the decision that's best for Benjamin, so I just reassure him that I trust him to decide and then pray that God will give him peace. I know that this decision is one of the hardest he will ever be asked to make.

A group of friends from church goes to another room to pray for Dad's decision. Moments later, Benjamin returns to consciousness and asks if he could be alone with our parents. As we filter out into the hallway, I notice that we have a smaller crowd now. I've lost track of how much time has passed since I first arrived at the hospital, so I didn't realize how late it had become.

I start to wonder how the conversation inside the room is going. What important decisions are being made? I pray that God will give them wisdom and peace.

After what seems like forever (but was actually only about twenty minutes), they ask that just Erin and I would come back in the room. When we walk in and close the door, I notice that they've changed Benjamin's shirt. He starts to talk to us but then realizes he didn't change his pants yet. He tells us we should stay in the room but turn our backs so that we can keep talking. Benj keeps telling us, "Now don't turn around, girls, unless you want to see what the stork saw" and laughing.
Benjamin’s voice gets much more serious as he says, “Cary and Erin, I need to ask you something. I want to be buried at the cemetery just down the road from our house, but I need to know if that will be too hard for you.” I choke a little on my answer, because I now know that the decision about Benjamin’s life has been made. I tell him that would be the best possible place for his grave. Benj waits to hear Erin’s answer and then asks us both again to be sure.

I’m amazed at the clarity and peace with which this young man, not even seventeen yet, faces his death. I am also touched by the way that Benjamin is worried about others even now. Earlier this evening, he was asking anyone about whose salvation he had doubts if they knew Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. There is no doubt in Benjamin’s mind where he is going, so he has been making sure that all those he knows and loves will be joining him there. I can’t help but stand in awe.

Benjamin lies silent once again. The only people remaining here now are family members, and we are here for the night. At one point, Benj wakes for just a few minutes, and I slip up close to his head and apologize for pestering him when I was trying to keep him awake earlier. He says that I was only doing what he asked and not to worry about it. Tears stream down my face as I hug and kiss him goodnight. We tell each other, “I love you,” and I tell him one last time how proud of him I am. I realize that this is probably the last time I will ever be able to speak with my little brother.

Erin and I get situated on a chair that folds out into a small bed in the corner of the room. Everyone tries to settle in for what we know will be a long and sleepless night. The noises as Benjamin gags and chokes for air have gotten worse.
In the morning, our friends begin returning, but Dad has asked that they go to the waiting room. It’s been quite some time since Benj last spoke. Every few minutes, he wakes just enough to scratch his face.

Dad is trying to decide what to do about Benjamin’s oxygen mask. The doctors have assured us that removing it would have no effect on Benjamin’s comfort. They are concerned that it is serving to drag out his death and making it harder on the rest of us, though.

Once again, we lift Dad up in prayer as he struggles to make a tough decision. Shortly after, Benj wakes a little, removes the mask, rubs his face, and goes back to sleep. We are a little sad, yet relieved.

Shane has returned now, and one of our pastors is here with his wife. Some of the nurses who have worked with Benj and are off duty come to the hospital to see him. Time feels as if it’s dragging its feet.

As the nurses come, I’m not surprised to see how much Benjamin has touched their hearts. Even when he felt the absolute worst, Benj was always kind and courteous to them. One nurse had remarked that Benjamin was the only patient she had who would thank her for sticking him with a needle. What a witness he has been!

While time passes, it gets harder and harder to listen to Benjamin gasp for air. More than once, each of us goes close to him and whispers how much we love him and how proud of him we are and that it’s okay now for him to let go. Shane leaves the room for awhile. When he returns, he says he went outside to yell his prayers to plead with God to take Benj Home now and not leave him here to suffer any longer.
The youth pastor and his wife arrive from a trip to Kansas. While I’m talking to one of the nurses, I hear someone say that Benjamin is gone. I stand numb for just a moment. I look at my little brother’s body, then at the monitors with three unchanging, straight lines. Reality kicks me in the stomach. I let out a cry from somewhere deep inside myself and collapse onto a cot sobbing. Shane pulls me back up and holds me tight to himself.

My father is saying how wonderful it is that God took Benj Home on a Sunday. Benjamin loved church so much. It’s good that he’s gone to a praise service so much greater than anything we could offer. Still, I can’t help being selfish and wanting him here.

The trip home is so hard. Mom sobs that she never thought she’d leave the hospital without Benjamin. They always came together, and they always left together.

On the drive home, we pass Riley’s Cancer Survivors’ Park. I think about how I had so desperately wanted Benjamin’s name to be there. The tears start again, and I become aware of a painfully empty spot taking root inside me.

The walk down the hallway to Benj’s room seems even longer than the ride home form the hospital was. Erin had straightened it up and made his bed on Friday night so it would be nice when he came home from the hospital. She joins our parents and me in Benj’s bedroom, and the four of us hold each other and cry.

Our friends and family begin to pour into our home to show their love and support. Our house is filled with people telling their fondest memories of Benjamin, and their cars fill our long driveway and line the road in front of the house. The phone is ringing off the hook, and in between answering these calls I’m making calls of my own.
I’m grateful to keep busy, so I can keep from thinking too hard about the events of yesterday and today.

Before long, I feel as if everyone is closing in on me. I’m thankful for their love, and I know it’s good for mom. I’ve heard the story of my brother’s death far too many times and also had to tell it myself, though, so I quickly accept Shane’s offer to take a walk.
It feels good to be out in the open and away from the crowd. Shane and I start talking about memories of Benj. Soon, I'm thinking back over the past year's struggles.

I was about an hour's drive away from home when my dad called. He asked if I could miss my only Friday class and come home early for the weekend. I made the arrangements, and Dad said he was on his way. As I waited for him to arrive, I wondered what could be wrong. Erin had been in a serious accident the previous weekend, but the Lord brought her through with only scratches and a badly bruised muscle.

When Dad got to the dorm, Benj was with him. Together, they broke the bad news to me as gently as possible. No official tests had been done yet, but the doctors thought Benjamin had cancer. I was in shock. Benjamin was such a healthy, carefree guy. This couldn't really be happening. Surely, this was all a bad dream.

On the way home, I cried and held onto my little brother. He was such a rock. Instead of crying for his own trial, he was busily trying to comfort me. He said, "Cary, we just have to trust God and remember that He's in control."

I think about the faith, trust, and strength he had that night. It has been such a long road from that night to this one. I would never have imagined all that we would endure as a family, and I certainly didn't think for an instant that it would end this way. I have to force myself to remember that the advice Benjamin gave me on that night so many months ago is true even now when he's not here to remind me himself.

The next couple of days before the viewing are long and hard. Lots of people come in and out of our house constantly, and the phone never seems to stop ringing. Calling to cancel Benj's tuxes for prom and the wedding is one of the most difficult things I've ever done, but I don't want Mom to have to worry about it.
The nights are almost worse than the days. As the house grows quiet, the reality of the situation settles over us. I cry myself to sleep, and the bad dreams begin. Many times during these dreams, I think back over Benj's battle with cancer.

Benjamin went through seven months of the most aggressive protocol of chemotherapy available. The cancer that was originally found in his inner thigh muscles was also in his lungs and abdomen. During this time, Benjamin went through horrible side effects. Beyond the nausea, hair loss, and lack of energy, he developed painful sores in his mouth and throat. The skin on his feet started peeling away so that it hurt terribly for him to walk. These were only part of the things he endured.

Benjamin never complained, though. Instead, he tried his hardest to shield us from fully understanding how much pain he experienced. He was always polite to the hospital staff. Even on his worst days, Benj would usually try to muster a smile and a joke for those who came to visit.

Near the end of chemo, Benjamin underwent a surgery to remove all five muscles where the original tumor had been found in his inner thigh. The doctors told him he could never skate again, among other things. (Benj's response was to ask for roller blades for Christmas.) The doctors ended up only having to remove two of these muscles. It took him a little while to recover, but Benj was soon dancing again.
When he finally finished chemo, Benjamin was allowed to recuperate for about three weeks before starting two short weeks of radiation. It looked as if things were finally looking up for us. Benj would be well again soon, and our family could return to normal.

Benjamin only had two days of radiation left when a dreadful storm hit our family. Benj had been experiencing migraines so badly that he was nauseated. We thought that it was probably a side effect of the radiation, but the doctor told us to take him to the nearest hospital. Erin went with Mom and Benjamin to the hospital. We were a little worried but not prepared for what was coming.

I was about to walk out the door for church when the phone rang. On the other end, Mom was hysterical. She didn’t tell me what was happening but just told me to get Dad and get to the hospital immediately.

When we arrived, we found Mom and Erin in the hospital chapel. They were crying as they told us the doctors had found two brain tumors. The words hit me like a bullet. My knees gave way, and I dropped to the floor sobbing. I pleaded with God not to take Benjamin from us.

Several tests later, the awful news was confirmed and a surgery date was set. Benjamin was nervous and more quiet than usual, but he still didn’t complain and still didn’t question why this was happening to him. All of us were nervous too, and we wondered how much more we would have to bear.
The surgery that was supposed to take twelve hours only took two, and there were no complications at all. The doctors were amazed. Benj was joking with us just moments after coming out of recovery. The entire ordeal had been a miracle. God's hand was so evident throughout it. We thought this was a sure sign that we were really going to make it now.

Benj was given a little over a week before starting another eight weeks of radiation. All of us were so optimistic. Benj's skin was irritated, he would get pretty worn out sometimes, and he was experiencing occasional headaches, but the doctors were all amazed by how well he was doing. Benjamin was undaunted as always in his battle to recover.
It was on a Friday when Mom took Benj to Riley for tests. At first, we were anxious to hear the results. We had been planning a trip to Florida, and Benjamin was looking forward to the prom as well. We began to get a little nervous that the hospital was taking so long to call, though.

Dad answered the phone on that miserable Monday afternoon when the call from the hospital finally came. They told him that the cancer had survived. They were going to try another type of chemo that would begin with surgery the following Monday. When Benjamin found out, he wept much longer and much more bitterly than he did when he later discovered that he would die.

He tried to be strong and stay positive, but he was so quiet that week. Sharp pain began in his back before he knew the tumors were in his lungs. This pain grew to the point where he could hardly breathe, and his appetite was nearly gone. Even at that point
none of us, not even Benjamin, accepted the possibility that he might not make it. It had simply never been an option.
The day of the showing has now arrived. It’s a dreary, cold, rainy day, and I’m so nervous that I feel sick. A dear friend of mine prays with me on the way to the funeral home. I feel a little better then, but I’m still not sure how we’ll make it through this day.

As we walk into the room, I immediately feel better. The last time I saw my little brother his mouth was frozen in a gasping expression, and all of the color had drained from his poor, tired body. The body in the casket looks more like I want to remember Benjamin. He looks rosy and healthy, and his expression is the peaceful smile he used to wear in his sleep when I would go to wake him in the morning.

The day is long and exhausting, but it is also good for us. It’s a little encouraging to see all the lives Benjamin was scheduled to be here from two until nine, but there is a steady stream of people from the moment the doors open until well past midnight. The majority of the people wait at least two hours in line. We are told that some people have had to leave, because there was no room to park. Others have parked along the streets and walked through the rain.

Many people are amazed, including the staff of the mortuary. One of the funeral directors helped with Ryan White’s funeral. He tells us that more people are here than there were at that showing. Besides, some of those people were simply star-struck. There are no big names to draw this crowd, just a strong young man with a big heart who genuinely cared about the people around him.

Many of the staff from Riley come through the line weeping. More than once, we are told how that hospital has been shaken to its foundation by Benj’s death. He was only one death of the many that staff experiences every day. He stood out, though, because the love of Christ shone through his life like a beacon. What a miracle he was!
A day filled with more hugs than I would dare try to count has left me aching for a tender, strong, sincere hug from Benj. All four of us are exhausted. The dreary, cold rain that is still falling as we leave matches our moods perfectly. Erin remarks that it’s as if God is crying for our pain, and Dad prays that the weather will be nice for the burial tomorrow.

I am completely worn out both physically and emotionally as I climb into bed. I say a prayer that God will give Benjamin an extra-special hug and remind him of how much we love him and how proud of him we are. I’m not sure how theologically sound my prayer is, but it is certainly sincere.
When I awake the morning of the funeral, the very first thing I do is look out the window. Dad's prayer was answered in just the way he had hoped. After how cold and wet it was yesterday, it's a little surprising to see how beautiful it is now.

We say our last good-byes at the funeral home. I know it's just his body and not really him, but it's still difficult. I place one last kiss on his cold, bald head, and our family tearfully leaves the building. As we climb into the limo, I am amazed at the amount of cars.

Nearly 100 vehicles follow us to the cemetery. At the grave, a trumpet plays, a poem is dedicated to Benj, and our pastor reads some scripture and says a prayer for our family. People hug us again as they leave, but I still don't get the one hug I've been needing.

The ladies at church have made a wonderful meal for us. After we finish, it's time to go in the sanctuary for the memorial service. There is already a pretty good-sized crowd gathered. I say a quick prayer that this service will be everything Benjamin had wanted.

One of the teachers from the high school delivers a beautiful speech, and Shane cries through most of it. A girl from the youth group speaks about what Benj meant to her and other teenagers. The time comes all too quickly for Erin and I to sing. I have sung for people many times. I've even sung at a couple of funerals for family members. This is the most difficult by far, but it's also a good opportunity to glorify the Savior who Benjamin served so faithfully.

Among several praise songs, a couple of songs written for Benjamin, and a touching tribute given by our youth pastor, Pastor Nolen preaches. This is the part Benj
would have liked the best. The message of Christ that Benj lived out so eloquently is outlined in this sermon.

My little brother knew he was going Home, and he was so completely at peace with that. He just wanted to be sure that the many, many people he loved knew how to follow. The path was certainly well lit by Benjamin’s life, but people can be so very blind. I pray that they won’t miss the point in all of this. I pray that they won’t continue to trade the gift of life for the chains of sin even now that they’ve seen such a glowing testimony through Benj’s life and death.
Imagine your hair falling out at the age of sixteen. I don’t mean a receding hair line; I mean coming out in clumps. Imagine every time you wash your hair, it would fall out in your hands. Imagine having your mom helping you in the bathroom, because you are too weak to make it yourself. Imagine walking in your room and seeing balloons, cards, medicine, syringes, and an I-V pole beside your bed.

These aren’t pleasant things to think of, but I know someone living the very life I’ve described. He’s at Riley Children’s Hospital more than he is at home (and of course his mom is beside him every step of the way—afraid to let him out of her sight for one moment). He goes in for five days of extensive chemotherapy treatment, comes home for a day or two, and then is back in the hospital puking. He is periodically in the hospital for three to eight long days dealing with side effects from the poison called “chemo” running through his body. He has been diagnosed with Ewingsarcoma, a cancer in his leg muscle that has traveled to his lungs. He will undergo eight rounds of chemo that will last from May to December. This almost-young man will have to miss the first semester of his junior year and struggle to rejoin in the second semester.

He has the most amazing attitude, though, and I rarely see him without a smile on his face. He’s just trying to be a kid. He is the best entertainer I know, always trying to make somebody laugh. All of the nurses absolutely love him, and they fight over who will take care of him. But, even though he doesn’t want to show it, he is scared. As nice as the nurses and doctors are, he still dreads going into the hospital. He knows that he will be sick again. He knows he will be filled with drugs and won’t remember his visitors.

The doctors have run more tests now, and (Praise the Lord) 98 percent of the cancer in his lungs is gone, and the once grapefruit-sized knot in his leg has shrunken considerably, but they will still have to operate on his leg. This 16 year old already knows the pain of surgery, because he has had two different central lines put in. (The central line is two plastic tubes that attach to an artery on the upper-left side of his chest. The tubes come out of his body and have caps that attach to the end of them. Needles insert there to give him his antibiotics, chemotherapy, and other pain medicines.) When the doctors operate, they will also have to remove part of the thigh muscle in his right leg. He will never be able to play basketball, go ice-skating, or go in-line skating again. Even though this almost-young man will not be as active, he is very grateful to have his leg, be able to walk normally in a couple of years, and, more importantly, be alive. He also has a very strong faith in the Lord that allows him to be a witness to anyone that knows him.

As I walk across campus, I see lifestyle choices made with haste. I gaze around and see many young adults making decisions, oblivious to how it will affect their futures. Reminded of the 16 year-old boy, I wonder if there is really any thought put into the social trend of puffing on a nicotine stick or drinking at parties. That young boy didn’t do anything to deserve the tremendous trial he is going through. He struggles to make every day fulfilling, and I know he would be hurt to see the senseless choices made by his peers.
As a teenager, you never fully appreciate the things your parents do for you. That is until that one day when you have to rely on them for everything. You rely on them to get around the house, get food, and even go to the restroom.

All of the sudden, you wake up in a strange room. You try to get up but you feel _something_ wrong. You are in the recovery room from surgery. The pain you are in is so great that all you can do is cry. The first thing you say is, "Where are my parents?"

When they walk into the room, you know that everything will be okay. They will take care of you.

You realize how much your parents love you when they sleep in a chair that folds out into a bed, because they want to be in the same room with you through the night. Sometimes they are fortunate just to get a couple of hours of sleep. The next morning, you want something and they jump up to get it.

There isn't a day that goes by that I am not thankful for God's great gift to me. God's great gift to me is my parents."

May I have a copy of this, Br.?

This is a beautiful tribute to your parents. You know I really don't think they make these things as sacrifices. They love you so much and are such good people. All of this comes naturally. It's wonderful that you can be blessed by each other!
TO MY BENJI –

MAY YOU ALWAYS REMEMBER WHAT GOD SAID IN JEREMIAH 31:3, “YEA, I HAVE LOVED YOU WITH AN EVERLASTING LOVE; THEREFORE WITH LOVINGKINDNESS HAVE I DRAWN THEE.” JEREMIAH 29:11 SAYS, “FOR I KNOW THE THOUGHTS THAT I THINK TOWARD YOU, SAITH THE LORD, THOUGHTS OF PEACE AND NOT OF EVIL, TO GIVE YOU AN EXPECTED END.”

WITH LOVE, SUSHI

FROM DARK TO DAWN

WHAT IS THIS THING THAT RAVAGES SO DEEP?
THAT SILENTLY ATTACKS ME WHILE I SLEEP;
THAT WRENCHES ME WITH PAIN;
MY STRENGTH I CAN’T REGAIN;
IT FRIGHTENS ME AND CAUSES ME TO WEEP.

WHAT IS THIS THING THAT RAGES FROM WITHIN?
THAT FAVORS NEITHER WISE NOR WEALTHY MEN;
THAT ROBS ME OF MY HOPE;
TELLS ME I CANNOT COPE;
AND CAUSES FEAR AND DOUBTING TO BEGIN.

WHO IS THIS ONE WHO COMES WHEN I AM DOWN?
THIS ONE WHO SACRIFICED HIS LIFE AND CROWN;
WHO LEFT HIS HOME ABOVE;
WHO BLED AND DIED IN LOVE;
WHO GENTLY SAYS TO ME, “YOU’RE HOMeward BOUND.”

WHO IS THIS ONE WHO MAKES MY LIFE SECURE?
WHO GIVES ME GRACE AND POWER TO ENDURE;
MY HOPE HE DOES RENEw;
MY JOY COMES SHINING THROUGH;
MY JESUS – HE IS MINE FOREVER SURE!
Thanks for reaching to our hearts,
You’ve touched us and we’ve grown.
The funny times, the warm embrace,
God’s love you’ve always shown.
The memories we will cherish now,
are laughter to our souls.
In everything you said and did,
The Lord was still your goal.

Chorus
Do you know Jesus? He is my greatest friend.
Have you received Him yet? He’ll be with you to the end.
In my life, He kept me living. In my death, He set me free.
Do you know Jesus? I pray He’ll help you see.
Do you know Jesus? He’s everything to me.

I saw you there at Semi-State,
Cheering from the stands.
Making sure our team knew,
They had so many fans.
The stands in Heaven’s portals,
Are grander still by far.
We’ll win the game, we’ll shout and sing,
He is our Morning Star.
(Repeat Chorus)

We’ll go on and live our lives,
It’s hard to let you go
To a safe and peaceful place.
The reasons we don’t know.
All we had and did and said and hope to ever be
Is answered in this question, for all eternity.
(Repeat Chorus)
My cousin Benjamin was one of the most sweetest most beautiful people I've ever known. My cousin Ben had cancer of the liver, throat and brain. He went through terrible pain. He never complained, not once. He was so brave and courageous. No one knew what he went through except his mother. They were inseparable. They were very close. You hardly ever saw one without the other. Benjamin began his battle with cancer a boy and ended it a man. He was very compassionate.

It will be hard without him in the days ahead. His family will be in my prayers.

Benjamin will never be forgotten. I will always love him. I can't wait to see him again in Heaven where he is now with God and all His angels.
GENTLE BEN BEDEL
By Mary Barnard ("Auntie M")

that pensive smile was gentle Ben
sweet nephew, but more, my friend
one last embrace to me he gave
whispering courageous words I will always save
what did I learn from a life so brief?
something to help lift this unbearable grief

ture strength is gentle, faith childlike and kind
these things in my own heart I want to find
a lifetime in college couldn't equal that last day with Ben
I saw him confidently lay down his sword and enter in
Oh, Sweet Jesus let me be like him
 trusting completely faithful to the end

Loved ones and friends of gentle Ben
learn what his life taught us; how to win
He overcame the devil, the world and the flesh
to win eternal life we can do no less
young Ben showed us that it can be done
simply put ALL your trust in Jesus, God's Son
IN BEN’S MEMORY
By Virginia Flynn (A friend from church)

We are here today in memory of
Ben’s life with us all,
We’ve all been touched and united
through the prayer chain calls.
Ben’s witness reminds me of
the Apostle Paul,
Whether at home or hospital bed
it didn’t matter at all.
When we think of his witness
it puts us to shame.
How much have we all done
in Jesus name?
Just a smile, a kind word or
fall to our knees,
All this could mean so much
to our brothers in need.
Ben had a smile and
witness although he was in pain,
He knew a lost soul had
nothing to gain.
We could all make a difference
in someone’s life,
Whether they live in darkness
or walk in the light.
Most of us here have lived
several years,
But our lives compared to
Ben’s brings us to tears.
Ben’s witness lives on though
his journey’s complete,
He’s now worshipping, praising
God and kneeling at Jesus’ feet.

Our lives too will soon be past,
What have we done for Christ?
That’s all that will last.
TRIBUTE TO A FRIEND
By Mark Andrews

THERE ARE FOUR SEASONS TO EVERY LIFE
AND SOME LIVES ARE FILLED WITH STRIFE
BUT OUR BELOVED FRIEND BEN
WHOSE LIFE DID END
WAS AT PEACE WITH HIMSELF AND HIS LIFE

A BOY IN THE SPRING OF HIS LIFE
HAD NOT YET EVEN FOUND A WIFE
BUT HAD FOUND A KING
WHO ENDED HIS SPRING
TO BRING OTHERS TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

SOME MAY SAY IT’S A SHAME
AND OTHERS MAY SAY IT’S A GAME
BUT GOD SAYS IT’S RIGHT
AND SO WE PRAISE THAT TONIGHT
AND KNOW THAT BEN FEELS JUST THE SAME
Dear Benjamin,

Of course, I loved you before your name was ever entered in my grade book. How could I not love you? Your parents and sisters had already confirmed to me that you were special, that you possessed a sweet spirit which influenced your every word and action. Your teachers all respected your intelligence and cherished you for your compassion and quick wit. You had already been the topic of essays written by your friends, whose lives had been impacted with your courage. The wait had been long, and I wanted to call you my student, but first you needed to finish your grueling chemotherapy treatments. With help from your MHS teachers and a terrific tutor, you completed a semester of your junior year at home. Already I was seeing an outstanding student who expressed his sensitivity beautifully, and I grew even more eager for your presence at school.

Shortly after we returned to school from Christmas break, thirteen students and I, at their request, joined hands during class time and prayed for you. Tears flowed that day as we gave thanks for the Lord’s use of you, His vessel, to touch our souls. On January 29, 1998, an angel wearing a Tommy Hilfiger shirt, windpants, and Nikes floated into Room 5, smiled shyly at his teacher, and became just a “regular kid.” How silly it was of me to think even momentarily that it might take some time for you to adjust. On that first day, you established yourself as a soft-spoken leader of your fellow classmates, and your teacher was reminded each day afterward that you were the third Bedel to illuminate a classroom with God’s love, which burned inside you.

On the first night of the 1998 boys’ basketball sectional, my eyes were on you. There you were, in the middle of our student section, cheering the Jackets to victory. After the game, you and one of the night’s stars embraced and quietly celebrated at courtside. Later, you sat in the bleachers with Cary, Erin, and me, taking in the victory, laughing, and enjoying Christian fellowship. My heart was stirred that night, Benjamin. You were beautiful, vibrant, and angelic, a glowing reflection of the Lord and your family.

I know why our Heavenly Father blessed us with your return to school. He knew your heart. You had a mission to fulfill, and your wanted to serve as a physical reminder of the peace which comes with any trial, if only we allow God to hold us in His loving hand. No wonder you looked so beautiful, so jubilant, so serene in those last weeks. You were an angel on Earth, preparing to ascend to your eternal home after your work was done.

Now, choirs of angels are singing their praises, and Jesus, who has you in His eternal embrace is saying, “You served Me well, Benjamin. Welcome home.” Meanwhile, your mission will continue. Be assured that others will open their hearts to
the One who knocks at the door, because you showed them the only plan by which to attain true fulfillment. John Donne, an English preacher and author, speaks to Death in “Holy Sonnet 10,” but I hear your victorious voice when I read it:

“Death be not proud, though some have called thee mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so; for those whom thou think’st thou dost overthrow, die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me. From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be, Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow, And soonest our best men with thee do go, Rest of their bones, and soul’s delivery. Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men, And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell, And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well And better than they stroke; why swell’st thou then? One short sleep past, we wake eternally, And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.”

Through the victory you found in Jesus and shared so lovingly with others, you, Benjamin Bedel, son of Victor and Jackie, brother of Cary and Erin, angel in my classroom for such a short time, and angel in my heart forever, have shown us the way out of the darkness and into the light of eternal life.

Love,
Mrs. Sheets
HEART OF A WARRIOR
To the memory of my loving little brother
By Cary Bedel

The soldier struggled bravely,
and he’s earned his share of scars.
He always follows orders;
for his King he’s traveled far.

Where others had surrendered,
he just kept a steady pace.
He wears no fancy medals,
just a smile upon his face.

He loves his fellow soldiers,
wise or foolish just the same.
His courage spurs me onward,
and his faith puts me to shame.

It’s time to rest now, brave one,
for the King has called your Home.
Your battles all have ended;
from His side you need not roam.

It’s strange when battles seem to
us the darkest of defeats,
and then God reveals His plan
to show instead…
...a brilliant victory!