

I could not tell my story as a child without talking about how Joie impacted my life. As a kid, Joie was the big strong football player, the college man, and the courageous man. But most of all, I remember looking at Joie as an older brother. And like the big brother type, he would oftentimes include me in his day to day life.

I remember how he let me go jogging with him as a kid because he knew I liked being near him. Plus, I felt like a real athlete training with a big strong college football player. Running down Draketown Trail, I remember him looking over his shoulder with a smile saying, "Catch me Buddy!" As soon as I would give my best effort, he was gone, gone, gone, and laughing the whole way. I remember how afterwards we would jump in the lake in our boxer shorts and try to swim across. If a floating stick was ever nearby, Joie would always act like it was a snake and yell for me to swim faster. Even though he liked to joke with me, I always knew he loved me. Every time I ever did anything good, he would always slap me on the back and tell me good job.

Listening to music with Joie was always an experience as well. Joie always knew the words of every song on the radio...or at least it seemed that way. But I didn't know much about music as a kid, and I sure didn't know the words to popular songs, so I would always make the words up. Once I was riding with him to Villa Rica to get something to eat and a Vanilla Ice song came on the radio...Joie told me to sing along, but about halfway through me singing "She's a nice nice baby," Joie started laughing and said, "Jeremiah, do you know the words?" I was so embarrassed. Looking down, I said, "No, I don't." Joie laughed until his face was as red as his hair. Once he taught me the real chorus to the song, we rapped together while we ate our McDonald's ...even though I still had no idea what Vanilla was talking about.

And I know I wouldn't be doing this story any justice if I didn't talk about scratching Joie's back. He would always bribe me to do it by offering me candy or lending me a cd or two...but the usually ploy that would work was when he offered to let me watch Ducktales in his room with him...but only if I would scratch his back for 15 minutes. Joie would usually fall asleep and I would leave only to return the next morning to tell him that it was time for him to get up and go to work with my dad...to which Joie would usually reply, "Just 5 more minutes...no, 10, tell him 10 more."

Looking back, I loved getting smoked by Joie in a running match. I loved singing the wrong lyrics while he sang the right ones. I loved scratching his back while we watched TV. I loved shooting hoops and swimming away from snakes. I just never realized how much I enjoyed all these things until now. We never had any real profound conversations...because I was a kid. But that didn't matter to me. The only thing I cared about was being around him. His presence meant the most to me. He was such a figure of strength, and in my eyes, he never really lost his legs. In my mind, he did more on two prosthetic legs than a lot of people do on two good ones. And the thing I will remember most is how his spirit of strength only seemed to grow after his battle with meningitis. He moved forward, not backwards. He moved ahead into a place of bravery that I could only hope to visit one day.

I wish I had all the answers to the question of why. It might make this a little easier. Even so, I can answer the question of the kind of impact he had on me and everyone around him. And I am more than thankful that I had the opportunity to know him, and love him, and learn from him...and that to me shows that he had a life full of purpose, determination and love. I will miss him greatly. But at least I know now that he can run on his own two legs again.