

Lacey's Tribute

If there was ever a boy that deserved the best possible message conveyed about the impact of his life, it is our little man Eli. And who better to convey that love, respect, and admiration than his mother? There will never truly be enough words to convey what an amazing person he was, and how much he was loved and adored, but hopefully I can give you a small piece of some of the joys that he brought to our hearts.

Intelligence:

Anyone who even met Eli for five seconds knew what a "smart kid" he was. His vocabulary alone was beyond measure and he truly talked like a little adult. At his Kindergarten Iowa Test of Basic Skills, he literally tested as a third grader in vocab and I think that was as high as the ranking went. Even when he was one year old, he would use words like "that is very breakable". His skills at arguing and word use were beyond measure. He recently told a nurse in the Intensive Care Unit that his mom couldn't fly because "she had issues with her inner ears." Eli absorbed everything he heard and never forgot any of it. He was also such a practical child. We never had to worry about him making a bad decision. He was so responsible and well thought in everything he did.

ART: Eli was also an amazing artist. I have countless pictures and pages that he created and colored. His long fingers would do such delicate and precise work and he would settle for nothing less than perfection. Eli earned an award at Kindergarten graduation for being the most skilled artist and he didn't take that award lightly. He would design cards for birthdays and holidays that were so thoughtful and caring. His talent was certainly beyond anything Aaron or I could ever measure up to and we always wondered where it came from. Truly it was a blessing from God.

SCIENCE was another area that Eli excelled in. I think we bought and tested every science kit that the toy stores carried. We made goo, boogers, grew mold, raised sea monkeys, dissected bugs, grew tadpoles, and any other thing you can imagine. He loved telescopes and microscopes and anything that helped him catch a glimpse into the world of science. Being on the farm with his grandparents, he had so many amazing opportunities to explore the outdoors and he never wasted a second of it.

Hobbies:

FISHING: The first thing that comes to mind when I think of things Eli loved to do is fish. He would wake up each day and I swear the first thing that would cross his mind was the next opportunity he would have to go fishing. He fished nearly every lake in the Ames area and also adored fishing out at the farm with "Papa with the horses." We have so many great photos and memories from his trips. He recently went out on a fishing trip with "Papa with Olivia." They were a crew of "older gentleman" (no offense dad) and one feisty little seven year old. They fished all day into the dark and Eli never wavered on his desire to just keep fishing. In fact, when they were ready to pack it up for the night, Eli was the one begging for one more cast. His proudest catch was his first catfish, it didn't even matter to him that it was only about six inches long. He just loved the sport of it. He already had a great tackle box and

collection of lures and truly enjoyed his time just organizing his tackle and dreaming about his next fishing trip.

PAPA'S SHOP: Another one of Eli's favorite things to do was work in "Papa with Webby's" shop. In fact he told my parents they could never leave the farm because they wouldn't be able to take Papa's shop with them. They made so many creative and amazing inventions. (Eli thought he might like to be an inventor when he grew up.) One of my favorites was a tulip they cut out of wood and painted. Eli wrote the words "I love mom" on it and it sits in the windowsill above my kitchen sink. They made other "guy" creations like pokers, fake guns, and other things a mother probably doesn't need to know about. They created animals out of wood like a little pig that Eli studied just the right paint mix to color pink. They built birdhouses, and of course one of his most recent ideas was "Eli's Eagle" which Papa and Grandma brought today to share with all of you. It didn't seem to matter how cold outside it was, E was always ready to go out and work.

SPORTS: Eli of course was a football fan from the Cyclones to the Giants. He and Aaron always loved watching sports together and yelling at the tv until their voices were hoarse. I actually recently remember them watching a Cyclone football game and telling a nurse that she was going to have to wait until halftime to do what she needed to do because Eli was too occupied at the moment. He loved playing baseball more than any other sport and would play catch and bat the ball in the driveway as long as you would let him. I can remember him coaching me on proper techniques when I wasn't pitching to him at quite the rate of accuracy he was accustomed to with Aaron. Eli also loved to swim. He was a little fish in the water and would swim all day if you let him. I remember the week he learned to swim when some great friends of ours, the Zobians, allowed us to take a retreat at the summer home. It was a little break away from hospital life and he took advantage of it. It came so naturally for him.

OUTDOORS: Eli was an outdoorsman and an adventurer to say the least. He loved to be outside whenever he got the chance, whether he was racing his Gator around the yard and dumping his brother out on the grass, or digging in the dirt for worms, bugs, or any other disgusting little thing. He loved collecting animals and "Grandma with Webby" even saved dead snakes and bats for him to explore. I wasn't so excited about it when I found a dead snake in the back of my truck a few weeks later. He brought every sort of bug into the house whether it was a spider in a jar or lightening bugs in a bug catcher. Eli and Isaiah actually made grasshopper skewers once day that actually looked good enough to grill. He loved picking flowers for me and made the most beautiful dandelion bouquets any mother ever laid their eyes on. He would decorate the bouquet with yucca leaves, lilacs, or any other treasure he found growing in the yard. He liked collecting sticks, pine cones, crab apples and any other "collectible" that grew outside. One of his favorite things to do was go on treasure hunts outside that "Grandma with Webby" would set up for him. She would make maps and he would go around like a true little pirate on the hunt for the gold at the end of the journey. Eli loved to garden. He would pick anything Grandma could grow from eggplants, to peppers, to pumpkins, squash, gourds, and beans. He loved water balloons and water fights and would even jump at the chance to splash around outside and wash Aaron's car in the summer. Being in Colorado was one of Eli's favorite vacation spots. One year we gave him the choice between a trip to Disney or a cabin in Colorado and he picked the cabin. He loved to explore on trails (if he didn't have to hike too far), looking for scat, and hunt for bear tracks. I can

remember one of his favorite mini hiking trips at the YMCA camp, where we climbed over a log across a little stream. That was truly his idea of a perfect day.

COOKING: Eli loved to be in the kitchen with me. There were few meals that I cooked, where he wouldn't be seated on the counter next to me ready to help out. He would make cheesy eggs and Saturday morning doughnuts with me, and many different homemade popsicle and slushy combinations with Aaron. He helped me bake bread for the state fair. I always thought his future wife would be pretty impressed at his skills in the kitchen. In my mind, I was helping her out with the things I would teach him. His favorite thing to eat was noodles. He liked anything from alfredo to teriyaki. He loved asparagus picked from "Grandma and Grandpa with Webby's" house, rotisserie chicken "on the bone" as he called it, and giant turkey legs at the state fair. One of my best food memories of Eli was a moon and stars watermelon that he and grandma had tried to grow for several years and finally had success this last summer. He even kissed the watermelon on the day that he got to pick it. He and Sai split it in half and sat at the kitchen table and just dug in with their spoons without even cutting it. Eli had a sense of adventure with food and loved weird things like octopus. He even ate wasabi once on a dare from me without even throwing a fit about it. And finally, if I failed to mention his love for blue ring pops, I would be selling the story short. One of my favorite pictures of Eli is him with a bright blue ring pop tongue to match his bright blue eyes.

ANIMALS: Eli was definitely an animal lover, particularly dogs. I think his very best friend was Grandma and Papa's dog Webby. They would snuggle together on the couch and Eli would feel and comment on Webby's soft ears. He also loved and adored his dog Harley and I think Eli was truly the only reason Aaron and I didn't kick her to the curb years ago. He would call her a princess and precious, and smooch her little face. He was always taking good care of her and defending her when she would do something naughty.

Isaiah:

If there was ever a kid who loved to torture his brother, it was Eli. He would take great pleasure in jumping on Isaiah, wrestling him, teasing him and doing absolutely anything he could just to "get at him." We would always say "Eli, why do you do that to your brother?" and Eli would reply "I just love to hear him squeal" with a wicked little smile. However, he was also an extreme protector. He was the only one allowed to pick on Isaiah and would always look out for him. I remember a recent time in Colorado where we stopped at a noodle restaurant and there were two other little boys there. They were closer to Isaiah's age and Isaiah was playing with a string on the blinds. One of the other little boys came over and snatched it out of Sai's hand and Sai, being such a tender heart, just stepped back and let him do it. I saw Eli watching, he walked over, snatched it right back and handed it to Sai. Then he stood in between just to make sure it didn't happen again. I just observed and let the scenario play out. I talked to Eli about it later and he said that his job as a big brother was a protector and no one else was going to mess with Sai but him. There were also stories of similar situations at the playground at school. We could all really tell that Eli took accountability for taking care of his little brother while they were at ACA. The two boys definitely had a bond that will never be able to be replaced.

Personality:

SARCASM: If you were ever around Eli for any length of time, you would discover that he had quite the gift of sarcasm. One could argue whether that mostly came from Aaron or myself and you would probably be correct in either direction. His classic line would be “oh, I would LOVE to go do that” or “that sounds like a GREAT idea” followed with something like “heavy on the sarcasm,” as if his voice and mannerisms didn’t express that enough as it was. He truly was a little adult and understood the finer sense of using his expressions to get his point across, even if it was at times frustrating for mom and dad.

PRANKSTER: Eli truly loved to pull pranks. He took great pleasure in making others laugh and perhaps even if it was a little at their own expense. He loved putting duct tape in Aaron’s leg hair when he least expected it, hoping to pull a little hair when it came off. He would put ice down my shirt or pants hoping it would melt and make a little puddle before I could get it out. He filled the toilet once with paper after he had gone to the bathroom on the bottom layer. Eli loved all the practical joke kits that you can buy whether it was a fake pile of poo or vomit, an electric shock hand shaker, or a cookie with a cockroach hidden inside. He had a pack of fake gum once that would snap your hand every time you tried to pull a stick out. I think I heard a thousand giggles from him due to all the people he tricked on that one, including his little brother. One of the funniest stories from this last hospital stay was with me in a double room. We had roommates this particular night and there was a curtain pulled between his roommate’s bed and his. His roommate was sitting with his mom on the other side of the curtain. Eli ripped a pretty loud toot that clearly the whole room could hear. He looked at me and said “mom, what did you eat?!?” He was clearly blaming his toot on me for the roomies to hear. One last funny story from Eli the prankster was involving his little bro. During several occasions, Eli would convince Isaiah just to hold still while he created marker artwork on his face. Usually it was a mustache or goatee and Sai almost always fell for it. I cherish the memories of his orneriness and truly appreciated his sense of humor, even during hard times.

BRAVERY: Eli was truly the bravest person I know. He fought so hard for so many years with unflinching faith and strength. Aaron and I both talked to him on the afternoon that we found out he had leukemia and he took a few minutes to absorb it, didn’t cry, and then eventually put up his fists and said “I’m ready to fight.” He was so amazingly strong and such a hero. He would get flu shots without any complaint (even holding and encouraging his little brother through his), getting accessed with no fear, and truly go through countless scans and procedures without the smallest sign of being scared. Recently in the ICU, they were poking him over and over, looking for a vein. His body was covered in sores and remains from previous lines and incisions. He simply sat on his bed and watched. He never questioned or complained, just observed. Even as a little kid he was never afraid of the dark, scary movies, or even death and dying. There isn’t a single person in this room who can truly say they are as strong and brave as our little man. It was truly an honor to be by his side during treatment. The example he set forth was something I hope everyone will remember for the rest of their lives.

MOMMA’S BOY: Of course this is my right to talk about this because this was one of my favorite parts about Eli. He was truly a little momma’s boy. Anyone who asked, he would tell. He loved

to snuggle and cuddle and would say to me “come over and snuggie with me, mom.” He never wanted me to worry or fear. When I would question how he was or if something was wrong he would always say “don’t worry about it, I’m fine” or “this is how I always look.” He would always compliment me and tell me how pretty or skinny I was. He was always building me up rather than worrying about himself. One of my favorite recent stories that Aaron told me was about his blue eyes. Everyone always loved his bright blue eyes and as usual, a nurse complimented him on them. He told her that he got his blue eyes from his mom and Aaron said “excuse me, what color are your mom’s eyes?” Eli said “well, I get the blue from my dad, but the brightness from my mom.” I could never resist his requests, even if it was making noodles at midnight on a school night or the fifth trip to the refrigerator to refill his juice cup. He had his mom wrapped around his little finger and there was nothing I wouldn’t have done to see him smile. It seems that as he got older, he grew to look more and more like me and I will truly always be heartbroken from missing my partner in crime.

FAITH: Aaron and I both had the same thought recently on Eli’s honest and real demonstration of “faith like a child.” He always believed in God and Christ as his Savior. He never doubted or questioned and always believed in his values with a steadfastness that Aaron and I always cherished. He always wanted to celebrate holidays like Christmas for their true meaning and honestly loved to give more than receive. He was so special and pure in beliefs. One morning my mom was dropping him off at school and as she walked away, she saw him put away a little art set that she had given him and get out a little Bible that he had in his backpack. He liked to collect little colorful Bibles and would always read them, even before he was really reading a lot on his own. I believe he had a deep faith and connection with God and one that we should all look up to.

CONSIDERATION FOR OTHERS: Eli had one of the biggest hearts I have ever witnessed in my life. He never wanted anyone to feel bad and would always be gracious in the weirdest of circumstances. One time, on a flight to NYC with Aaron, a stranger offered Eli a lifesaver and he thanked her for it and held it in his hand. Later, after she walked away, he looked at Aaron and whispered “I really don’t like this flavor.” He would receive duplicate gifts and be gracious without batting an eye. He would get treats from people that he really didn’t care for, but always acted like he was appreciative. You could always count on Eli to have good manners with distant acquaintances and never embarrass you at the wrong moment. He never judged people or even seemed to notice when others were scarred, disfigured, or just looked different. He was so generous in his giving that he was always putting others before himself. He would always look for something in his room to take and give to Grandma and Papa before going to their house. Eli once even donated his entire piggy bank savings to his classroom when they were having a coin contest at school. I asked him if he was sure he wanted to give all of his savings away and his answer was “of course” with a smile. There was no selfish tendencies, just true generosity. He was such an amazing little man.

Why did God choose Eli?:

I want to start my closing with a famous CS Lewis quote. “We are not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be.” I am sure there are people in this room who question why God would choose Eli for this. Why would God allow a

little boy to fight cancer for four and a half years and then come in the night and just whisk him away? Eli even asked himself a few times why God would have chosen him to have cancer and battle through pain and suffering over half of his life. But I can confidently give you the answer to that question, just as Aaron did to Eli when he asked him recently. God allowed this to happen because he knew that Eli would touch the lives of thousands of people. He knew that there would be those who were called to Christ because of the example that our child demonstrated. God knew that Eli had the strength and the courage to live through four and a half years of pain and challenges and still smile, laugh, love, and have faith through those times. He was an amazing little boy, and I know that my heart will ache every day for the rest of my life to hold him and tell him that I love him here on earth. But if I had the chance to start over and choose a different child or choose a different life, I would still choose mine and I would still choose Eli. He is my hero and my warrior until the end of time. I am truly better for having known him and grateful that he is in Jesus' arms where he deserves to be.

Please don't walk away today allowing Eli's life to be in vain, but learn from it and grow from it. Put your faith in the power of Christ and His Salvation as Eli did. Grow in strength and love within your own life and faith, and if you have children, be the best example and leaders for them.

Eli...I love you to the moon and back, buddy.