

Eulogy for Nathan David Kehrein

Presented by Glen Kehrein - father

I can hear Nate saying to me. “Dad, it is time to man up and do this thing.”

I want to talk about my son. Right now I do not want to mourn him, I want to tell you about him – straight up, truthful, just like Nate was. No smoke, no mirrors no BS. Anyone who knows that this is Nate, say AMEN. So God give me strength.

I have asked my good friend Earl James to stand here with me for strength, holding me up. Earl and I have been friends for years but more than that we share a unique bond together that I share with no other person. It is a long story that I would love to share with you some day.

Finally, by way of introduction to my son, I would like to mention that Nate’s a composite man – I would not quite call him a renaissance man – but he was a composite man. He loved to be in the woods, in the country, in camo clothes in a tree stand. But he was also a military man and he was very, very proud to wear that blue uniform. But he was also a city boy. A full fledged west sider and when he went shopping with his girl he bought the most BLING_BLING ghetto clothes money would buy.

That Nathan David Kehrein was born in the middle of the biggest snow storm of 50 years portended life would be a shovel full. Our son always said that he lived life on life’s terms. That means that you must play the cards that you have been dealt. His little nephew, Sean David Smith says it like this, “you get what you get and you don’t throw a fit.”

In the spirit of the Serenity Prayer, Nathan wished many things were different, but he accepted that they may not be.

As a boy Nate had **good** athletic talent and he excelled. But he didn’t have **great** talent. So while he dreamed that he could play Division I football, he accepted that Lane Tech glory was enough and he often relived those great days. While he loved the camaraderie of the team, he was not able to sustain many ongoing friendships with his team mates over the years.

Nathan’s faith in God was very real. But it was not conformed to prescribed doctrines or religious form.

Nathan was not religious. He was real. He often said he knew there was a devil because he had seen him in the dark places on the other side. He did not mean that figuratively. He said he also knew there was a God because he had brought him out of those dark places.

Since Nate’s death, I’ve come to see that when your adult child spends years in darkness, it clouds the memory of who he was as a child. Nate always said that he did not remember much about his childhood. By looking



God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next.
Amen.

--Reinhold Niebuhr

through his childhood things I was surprised about how much I had lost track of about this most amazing boy. People seemed to always be enthusiastic about Nathan – they either really liked him or deeply wished he was in someone else’s class. This report from the 6th grade is from four teachers and you will get a sense about who he is and why teachers are not compensated enough:

PhysEd - *“Nathan is good athletically - will take advantage of the other students when opportunity arises - does not respond to correction graciously.”*

“Nathan is extremely talented. He scored 140 on the first music test. I would like for him to give his undivided attention in class, refrain from disrupting the class with untimely conversation and exercise control, respect.”

“Nathan has accumulated more Accelerated Reader points than any other 6th grade student. This indicates that he is reading and understanding a variety of books. I hope he continues this fine work.”

“Nathan is doing quite well in my classes. he often disrupts the class by talking out, a behavior he has problems controlling. Mr. Koerner and I have instituted a type of merit system which I hope will help Nathan get rid of this habit. I enjoy having him participate in class but he’s got to understand there’s a right way of doing this. I hope he keeps up his good work.”

As a child Nathan was engaged with so much that Rock Church and Circle Urban Ministries offered. During a sermon from Pastor Raleigh on “resisting temptation”, Nate drew this. The boy-duck was battling a good angel against a bad angel who were giving these thoughts: But as an adult he withdrew from the many friends and church family members that beckoned him close. Lonni and I thank God for the space and grace granted by the Rock family who always rejoiced with unconditional acceptance at his infrequent appearances.

Nathan spent four years in the Air Force and was honorably discharged after one tour of duty in the Gulf, as Airman First Class. He competed in the elite Defender Challenge program and made the base team, then he made the national team and finally he made the world team. Nate was proud that he had pushed himself to the very farthest point of his mental and physical endurance.

As a civilian and when Nate’s struggles increased, the Veterans Administration became a refuge. I want you to know how good God is. The daughter of my friend – Earl James, was Nate’s social worker. She gave him many hours of a compassionate listening, support and love.



It is very popular these days to bash the Federal government as totally inept and incapable of doing anything right and good. But Lonni and I are here to witness to the fact that the VA hospitals and programs were Nathan’s life preserver. Without them he would have drowned years ago. At the VA, we have met some of the finest of health care professionals that we have every known. (almost the caliber of Drs. Beran and Stannard!) They have cared for, pursued, supported and encouraged Nate for years. On Monday Nathan will be laid to rest in a beautiful spot out where his beloved dear run free -- all provided by the United States. We are deeply grateful.



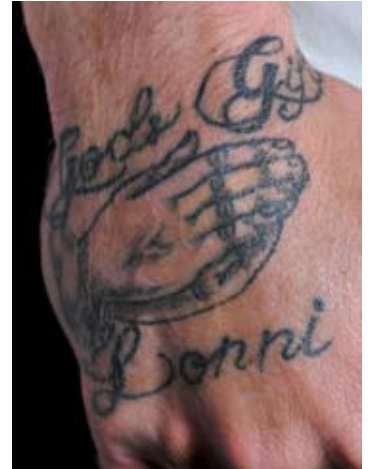
Danny Davis, our congressman and my good friend is here today. He has fought for down and out people like Nate his entire political career. Danny I thank you for all that Nathan has received. We desperately look for the day when all people can have access to the kind of health care that Nate received.

When Nate returned to Chicago after military service, he became connected to the men of Circle Urban's Maintenance Crew and Transformation Home. Big Leonard Greer and Nate bonded their hearts while sharing a fishing boat in Northern Canada. There Leonard caught his first Northern Pike ever – 38 inches long. Seated here are our extended family. These are the men of Transformation and Circle and are many of the reasons we had many, many more years with Nate. They lifted him and he lifted them. These men are suffering a loss as deeply as do we, because long ago we joined our families to wrap our arms around this hurting young man. All you men are forever in our hearts of gratitude. Nathan loved you. We love you.

Nate appreciated the preaching and teaching of his good friend Pastor Linc. But he was not afraid to rag on him when Nate thought the southern showman hoop was a little too over the top. More to his liking were the many, many hours he and his Pastor-buddy spent hunting, watching deer hunting videos and then long, deep, meaningful talks about family and friends and the love of a woman. That was Nathan's church. He liked his pastor better dressed in hunting camouflage than a suit.

Then the love-of-his-life introduced Nate to another church, The Chicago Tabernacle, that brought him into peace and worship. Often his mother Lonni and Nate would journey together to this blessed place of worship, praise and prayer.

This is the last tattoo that Nathan got several months ago. It says, "God's Gift – Lonni"



Rock Church Youth Group, Wolf Pack BB, a summer experience in Japan with the Bergs, Transformation Home, Men In Action and countless individuals, animals and fish nurtured Nathan's spiritual journey. Three weeks ago Nathan said to his loving mother, "Mom, many people with my problems blame God and turn their back on Him. Mom, I want to assure you I will never do that. God has been very good to me. He has protected me and kept me through so much."

During the final leg of his journey and upon discharge from a recovery program Nate found a group called MIA – Men in Action. Eric Metcalf, the founder and leader of MIA, has been a mentor to my boy, providing to him spiritual development, a beautiful home to live it and a real friend. This community of Men have been Nate's



source of strength and have given him peace and safety. His family is so deeply grateful and pleased to memorialize Nate's life through Men In Action.

For all of you that have had a hard time with Nathan's choice to end his pain, he would like you to know that he kept his word to his mother, he did not turn away from God. He turned very deliberately to God. And with deliberated intention put himself into God's arms.

This is the picture that Nathan had of himself. Without any strength, totally spent, held up only by the power of love. Nate tattooed this painting on his left forearm and he listened "Can I Lay in Your Arms?" – it touched his soul.

This painting hung in his bedroom in his beloved “River House.” It was tattooed for life upon his forearm so that he never forgot and he never left this truth behind. This reality went with Nathan into his deepest, darkest moments and it went with him into the worst of bad places to which he went when he slid downward. So this Christ was there, with him, visually, when each time he was ready to come back. This painting is entitled, “Forgiven.” **The only hope for Nate – and for us all, is that we are forgiven.** We are all broken, weak and self-consumed with our addictions. Your addiction may be much “prettier” than those of my son, they may not. They may even be obsessions of ego glamorized by the world, it may even be “ministry” -- but make no mistake, the core struggle is the same and the core answer is the same.

To the “Tiger-Woods syndrome” that is within us all, Nathan would like to say that the only sure path is not perfection. It is not greatness. It is not accomplishment.

It is forgiveness.

I have chosen to think that Nate’s last thought as he slipped away was, “forgive me” as he slumped into the arms of his God. There he rests now and there he is at rest.

Our little family is learning to forgive each other for past wrongs. None of us know very well how to be good children, responsible young people and great parents. It is all on-the-job learning. And as we work it out, we can deeply wound each other. We can even crush each other.

Nathan’s struggles with depression, anxiety and the rest of the inner demons would overwhelm him at times. For long periods of time it would crowd into a small corner all of Nate that was sweet, loving and caring. **It took more energy for Nate to make it through one day than most of us expend in a life time.** But with help, he could return to enjoy life, the woods, a big buck that he knew lived up on the hill and large mouth bass -- young niece, nephew and a little brother. And other very, very special people to include his Dad.

As time passes and clear perspective returns, we wish we could go back and make different choices. We know, though, that we can not.

Within your circles of life – family, friends and acquaintances -- old high school buddies and teammates are people struggling with this darkness and this illness. They will pull away from you because they know how hard it is to be with them. They will pull away because it is so hard for them to be with you. Being with people creates an indescribable anxiety for them so they create reasons to blame you, attack and burn bridges.

So most of us let them go. It is what they want, right? No. Nate burned so many bridges and was so lonely. But an old Air Force buddy, Louie Pozo, and Louie’s family did not let him go. It was always a good thing to hear Nate say, “I’m getting together with Louie.” It brought us peace and brought him great enjoyment to be with this family. Thank you so much, Louie and all the Pozos.

Our family is celebrating the terrific life of Nathan David Kehrein and all that he has meant to us and taught us. He has taught us to cherish each moment, forgive each other and make the main thing the main thing.

Nate, thanks for all the good memories. You are a terrific son and a wonderful person. We already miss you so very much!