

December 2, 2010

Dear Benny

We spoke barely a week ago, and everything seemed so right so good. We chided you that you didn't keep in touch and you replied you were busy and said "it's only been 6 days, it's not the end of the world". I said yes it is, "G-d took 6 days so it was the end". Benny chuckled and replied "good dad, very good". We had no idea how prophetic it was to be!

And then Friday we got the horrible news that you had died. When I picked up the phone and was asked if I was your father and then told that you had crashed and that you had died it was too unbelievable. I screamed and shouted together with Hanna that it was not true, that it was a mistake and that it could not possibly have happened. The pain was so intense, it made me grind my teeth and cry but not a normal cry more like a moaning sound and then I lashed out hitting the wall in agony. The minutes passed like hours and the hours like days and then the police came with a formal document but still it seemed impossible that this should happen to you our Benny our beautiful son. Slowly, gradually, inevitably the sharpest of pains became dull and the feeling of void, emptiness came over me. The loss of your voice, your cheeky smile, your grin from ear to ear was not ever going to come back. I thought of you bringing the dogs, which you loved so much, back from their walk, as you came down the driveway in your striding pace and how I chided you that the leash was not on which you dismissed causally with your grin; or how you stood in the back courtyard with a bottle of beer in your hand doing a BBQ for us and refusing the apron I was offering you; or how you sat across the table with a glass of red in your hand telling me how to appreciate and enjoy wines, and making fun of the half opened ones I still kept in the fridge.

I'm missing you Benny, your wit, your jokes, the times when I quizzed you on the meaning of some word and how in a split second you would come up with some fantastic explanation which brought a smile on both our faces as it was so impossible; and the times I asked you about the name of a flower or tree and you rattled off with confidence the most unlikely name knowing it wasn't so. Yes Benny you were full of fun. Remember when after dinner you were washing the dishes and monopolising the sink and complained loudly that I shouldn't squeeze past you, I must have touched your bottom - no you wouldn't move to one side.

Simple things, fun things which I will not be able to share with you anymore. At other times you were moody or argumentative but the storm passed quickly and we sorted things out. No - those things I will not be able to have out with you anymore and that leaves a big hole in my heart. People come and pay me condolences and tell me that I should be strong. But you are 28, cut down in the prime of your life like a blossom that has just burst out of its bud, with a love of life and enthusiasm for reaching to the rainbow and beyond.

You were a wonderful young man whose passion for flying started in boyhood and carried you along till you became a pilot at the University of Western Sydney. And then at the early age of 22 you took off to the US where you became an instructor at the University of Embry Riddle at Daytona, Florida. For the next 5 years you dedicated your life to your job excelling in your work and building up a network of loyal friends with whom you shared your passion and enthusiasm for flying. You really were exceptional. As time passed and your expertise grew you took up gliding and also aerobatics where you competed in such shows. The adrenalin rush simply pushed you on. With equal passion and energy you played soccer, did indoor rock climbing and mountain biking where you got the nickname of 'tree hugger' and even one time riding in dense bushland you came face to face with a puma. You looked at each other in shock surprise before the mountain lion took off to your great relief.

Back home in Australia on your visits you played touch footy with your brother Danny. You bought a surfboard and tried out your skills. You started capoeira and came home with big blisters on both your feet 'cause it's practiced barefoot'. Your good friends from Moriah College days were encouraged by you, one and all to join in your adventures be it biking or bush walking. They all loved you and were only too happy to follow you. You shared holidays, enjoyed hanging out, listening to music, traveling together, fooling each other and playing any and all practical jokes, followed by a full hearted laugh.

I also took you under my wings to teach you how to invest in shares. Over the years your flying education was expensive so you received the lion's share of what was spent amongst my 3 children. Even so, when you saw my share portfolio you said that had you known you would have spent even more.

When you and Eitan wanted to go to the casino you asked me along, I wonder why? Benny darling you and I did have fun moments.

But your life overseas was a bit of mystery. Not until when the tributes came pouring in, did we become aware of just how many lives you touched. Countless letters from your former students and friends are pouring in attesting your excellent ability as a pilot and instructor. Most of all they appreciated you for being a friend and so kind, always willing to give a hand, for being easy-going with a sense of wit and humour, ever ready to pull a fast one and to join them for some adventure or other. And so enthusiastic about flying that you were an inspiration to others. Now that you are gone there is an outpouring of grief by so many, with standing a moments silence this week at your old University Embry Riddle, having a page dedicated to you in their newspaper, your close friends enjoying a celebration dinner at your favourite Japanese restaurant, a larger memorial in your honour in 2 weeks time, and a whole bunch of your pilot friends flying in formation with your 2 best buddies Andrea and Ponso veering off west into the sunset in your memory.

And here too, at the start of the footy games last week, the whole field of dozens of teams at Queens Park stood a minute's silence in your honour. The radio and newspapers are also carrying your story, you were so special. You were a good friend to many and your loss leaves a hole in many hearts. But if your friends would share their lives with us it will make mending the heart easier. You left us too young, much too young. You should have married had children and grown old and grey and say Kaddish after us not the other way around. Your death is such bad luck, a pity, it's so unfair, so so unfair.

But you so liked flying. You took jobs ferrying planes from America to Australia. It meant flying solo in this one engine plane, filled to the brim with petrol, no room for you to move and so for the next 14 hours above the Pacific Ocean you would cruise till you got to your first stop Hawaii. And then refuel and travel further to Western Samoa, Kiribati and other Polynesian islands, island hopping till you got to Brisbane or Cairns. You did this as well over the Atlantic, hopping from Canada to the Azores then Portugal, Spain, Italy, Croatia, Egypt, Jordan. You were meant to go to India but undercarriage problems stopped you. So it gave you a chance to enjoy Petra then hop over to Eilat for some scuba diving and back to Kfar Saba to join family and enjoy a communal dinner. You always enjoyed life to the fullest. You saw so many places you criss-crossed the US and enjoyed it immensely and once traveled all the way to Canada in a sea-plane with a group of retired aviators and landed in a pristine nature reserve. Do you remember how shocked you were seeing a moose's head which the local Indians had killed and were skinning it? You felt nauseated but overcame it and went back to observe and check it out. You were inquisitive and always willing to learn. You also loved your books and started to learn Spanish to broaden your horizons. You saw the Grand Canyon, you traveled to the Bahamas with your friends. You did things that few of us have a chance to. And all this because of your wonderful spirit, but with danger on the horizon the risk was that something might happen out there. And so just last week you shook the hand of your fellow pilot in the other plane, grinned your wonderful smile and said to him "see you in Hawaii". Sadly 3 minutes out of the airport the plane lost power and crashed.

Unfair to us who raised you from a baby to watch you grow into a wonderful young man. Our happiness has gone and we will mourn you for the rest of our lives. And so unfair to your brother Danny with whom you had so many long discussions even whilst you were overseas. He looked up to you, loved you and shared so many things with you. He will miss you sorely.

And your sister Ruthie, who has so looked forward to Friday mornings when she wasn't working taking the pram with Shiran to Nielson park and you following on your bike and then when Shiran fell asleep you both talked for hours sipping a cup of coffee, coming back only when the child woke up. What a shame all this is gone.

And you were uncle Shoco to Lishai and Maor bringing them chocolates and loving them so much. I remember seeing you play with them so beautifully and they loved you so dearly squealing with pleasure as you carried them under your arms or on your shoulders. It's unfair to them that now they will grow up not knowing what a wonderful person you are.

And what a good mate you were to Eitan. You got on so well with him having drinks or going out or just chatting. He loved to spoil you, buying croissants or tuna dip. What a shock it was when he found out, falling to his knees in disbelief.

And my darling beautiful wife Hanna – she gave you life and looked after you, educated you, encouraged you in music and sports, and supported you fully. You used to look into her face with your big blue eyes and cheeky smile and say “come mum smile”. How cruel is fate to have taken you away.

The words that I have written do not do justice to his memory. His love of life, with his enjoyment of his wine, designer beers, and always the most expensive meal in posh restaurants, and meticulous in his dressing and appearance - he took so much pride in himself, his incredible adventures. his passion and enthusiasm, his kindness and gentleness, the people he touched and inspired, the many friendships that he developed, the many tributes on his facebook site, the countless telephones and sympathy cards, all make the task of telling the story of his life far from simple. No, not fiction, just beautiful reality.

It has been raining heavily the last few days, it seems even the heavens are crying.

I hope that his spirit will continue to burn forever and that all the lives he touched will draw strength from his many attributes.

With love
Your Father

Nathan Glattsein