

Annual Matt Update

January 29, 2012

Hello Everyone

Seven years ago...more pictures were taken with a camera than a phone. To tweet was to make a bird sound. Seeing the person you're talking to, who would've thunk it? Asking your phone a question and it answering you, *well that was just crazy talk...*

As each year passes I can't help but wonder what Matt would be doing now. Would he have found his dream job? I believe so because of his work ethic and tenacity. Would he have found the girl of his dreams? I certainly hope so. Would he have a child, my grandchild? Would it be a boy or a girl? What would his or her name be? Would he be living nearby? Maybe he would be here right now shooting hoops out front with Travis as they so often did. Sadly, we will never know.

I know what he would be doing this April, he would be attending a wedding of a dear friend he's had since before he was 2 years old. Our families have been friends forever we have shared so many special times together, birthdays, vacations, holidays, barbecues, sleepovers, late night fishing trips, you name it, but Matt will not share in this joyous occasion. He has missed so many special events including the Giants winning the World Series in 2010. I started taking Matt to Giants games when he was just a baby, seeing our Giants win the WS would have made his year.

It's the everyday stuff that I miss the most, but the special times stand out because he should be there. It will be SEVEN years this February 2nd since Matt was taken from us that horrible morning. As each day passes and we get closer to that dreadful day my heart aches more and more for him as I remember where he was, what he was doing and what was being done to him each of the last days of his short life. I will be eternally grateful for the wonderful 21 years I did have with Matt, I am blessed with incredible memories that I will cherish forever.

So many people go their whole lives not having what we had with Matt or have it and take it for granted, and that is a shame. Everyday I have a choice to make. I can be sad and depressed, (a feeling I fight daily) or I can be grateful for what I had, and what I have, and use my pain to make a difference. I choose the latter. We cannot make a difference if we wallow in self-pity, and if there is one thing Matt would have wanted it is to make a difference. He loved life, he loved to laugh, he loved to smile, and he loved to help people. He was a natural difference maker.

You see life happens to all of us, it's how we react that determines who we are and what we will be able to accomplish. We have to remember, sometimes seek out, the good things and be thankful for them. I am not in an elite group there are many following in my footsteps as I walk in the paths of those before me. That is why it is so important that we work especially hard to educate others of the dangers of hazing. This path is getting too long with the tears, heartache and despair of parents who have lost their beloved children in this senseless manner.

It is time to get back to making a difference. 2011 was a rough year for hazing it is out of control. We can all make a difference by talking about it. Talk to people young and old, tell

Matt's story, or tell stories you have heard about on the news or you have heard from others. Our young people are still dying in hazing incidents, some at the hands of others (they consider friends) and some at their own hands because the torturous degradation and humiliation are just too much. None of this is acceptable. It is our responsibility to make a difference!

I wanted so badly to sit here and write an uplifting update but I am finding it difficult. There is so much work to be done and it is weighing heavy on my heart, as I fear for the unsuspecting innocent lives that are going to be destroyed due to these heinous acts. There is so much good in this world, we need to find a way for it to over shadow the darkness. I think for that to happen we have to be bigger, bolder, stronger, louder, kinder, more generous and giving. Share what we know. Don't be afraid to speak up, for yourself or someone else. Put others before yourself. Treat people the way they deserve to be treated, with kindness, respect and a smile. Learn to love who you are so you can love others.

People are asking what we are doing this year for the anniversary of Matt's death. Are we going to Chico? I don't know, maybe, maybe not. I am so very proud of what Chico State is doing in Matt and Adrian (Heideman's) memory there. Maybe we will wait and go back next year to give a Matt infusion. No matter where we are I hope that everyone here and there will remember Matt on that day and always.

I would like to take a moment to commend my good friend **Hank Nuwer** for the wonderful work he does day in and day out, year after year in bringing awareness to hazing. He is a remarkable gentleman whose work is boundless. Not to mention a college professor and top selling author, who has written many acclaimed books on hazing. He is associated with Security on Campus and Stophazing.org. He keeps an ongoing chronology of all the hazing related deaths in the US dating back to the 1800's. He has done numerous interviews for radio, TV, journalists, documentaries, he is written up in books and known in the US as our resident hazing expert. Mr. Nuwer is truly making a difference and I would like to thank him for his endless hard work in helping to save lives. You can find his work on www.hanknuwer.com.

As I have for the last few years, I would like to recommend an extremely informative book, **Protect Yourself In College** by a wonderful author, Tom Kane. You don't have to be going away to college to benefit from this book. I encourage you to pick one up or order online today.

Another book I would like to recommend **Crashing Augusta**, by award winning author, Jon Littman. Mr. Littman wrote Matt's story in an 11 page article in the October 2006 issue of Playboy. This article depicted the most gruelingly accurate account of what happened to Matt, so much so that it was the most difficult read of my life. But it also helps you understand just what hazing is all about and what can and has happened when things are taken too far. **Crashing Augusta** is made up of five original Playboy stories of man at his strongest, swiftest and most dangerous.

Thank you for remembering Matt in your prayers. If you think of it, light a candle on February 2nd in remembrance.

"Hug your children and tell them you love them everyday."

God bless.

Love,
Debbie, MM

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