

I have known Bryan all his life. He was the youngest of 4 and I was the oldest. We were spaced 3 years apart, so he was 9 years younger. To begin with we did not have much in common except love of the outdoors that we got from our parents. We older ones felt that Bryan was coddled. We cruelly teased him about having brown eyes and said he had been adopted from St. Joseph's. Tim and I did, Merodie was Bryan's protector.

As Bryan's personality began to show, I found more in common with him -- because we were both shy. Tim had a more dramatic personality and Merodie, after all, was a girl.

Bryan always had unusual pets, turtles, lizards, snakes, caimans and other cold-blooded creatures. There was also a family cat. Occasionally, small critters would escape. Mom was unflappable. I remember when a guest reached up to turn on a living room lamp and came in contact with a lizard. Mom said, "Thank you, we've been looking for that one."

A baby box turtle was attacked by the cat and survived but carried the scar on its shell for many decades, even becoming a demonstration in Bryan's science classroom. Another turtle, killed by a baby snapper, was buried under a marker that read, "Here lies Thistlethwait who was murdered."

Mom had input on the names because we did not know who Agamemnon was nor were we familiar with Algernon, other than as turtle names. We tent camped and Bryan got to sleep in the double sleeping bag between Mom and Dad. I was lengthwise across the entrance.

Neighborhood kids often came to our yard and played whiffleball in the driveway and alley. There were elaborate ground rules on when a hit landing in Mahoney's yard was a double or a home run.

When Mom directed Pioneer Girls Camp Cherith, we all came along for the opening and closing of camp, but for several years, Bryan stayed the whole summer, as an "honorary Pioneer Girl." He and Tim Lund, whose mother was the cook, lived the Tom Sawyer/Huck Finn life.

One year, we older three, having analyzed the map, set off to follow Bear Creek from a beaver dam to the access road. As darkness loomed, we were not lost, but just like Christopher Columbus, underestimated the distance. Several years later

when Bryan was old enough to come along, we recreated the trip in reverse, by canoe. How could we not have noticed those hundreds of fallen trees across the creek the first time?

Years later Bryan organized nearly annual pilgrimages to St Croix State Park to visit those “memorable sites,” perhaps subtly critiquing his brother’s planning skills.

When I started university, Bryan was only about 8 years old and had no idea of the crisis of faith I was undergoing. But 10 years later, as Karin and I were missionaries in Hong Kong, he became the wiser brother by sending me two books in response to something I had said in a letter. I looked at the books and decided I did not want to read them. They were about design in life.

As I look back on that era, I had succumbed to what I now call “academic disease.” It is a return to middle school, avoiding bullying by “doing what the cool kids do.” I had been indoctrinated with the assertion that life just arises, God was unnecessary, and belief was a sign of weakness. When I finally read those books, I saw that the scientific case was exactly the opposite. The intellectual high ground belongs to the Bible narrative.

Bryan was a wonderful person but that is not why he is in heaven. Neither is he with Jesus because he was a Biblical creationist. He is with his Creator because he recognized that being a good person was not enough, that he was a sinner and that Jesus had paid the penalty for his sin by His death on the cross and resurrection from the tomb. Bryan turned from his sin and accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. That is why he is in heaven.

John 3:16-18 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

Bryan does not want any one of you to miss out by failing to respond to the invitation you have received from the King of the Universe. To ignore it is the same as refusal and to delay assumes that you have unlimited time to decide.

Bryan had made his decision long before his life was suddenly cut short. If you have not made the decision, it is as simple as a silent prayer. "Jesus, I know I have done wrong, and I accept your death on the cross and your resurrection as payment for my sins."

What is holding you back? Science? Actually, it points to a Creator. Suffering in the world? It is explained by the effects of human sin, both our own and that of others. Wanting complete understanding? We make decisions all the time based on incomplete best evidence.

Don't delay. We cannot be guaranteed even one more day.

Ross Olson