

ALLIANCE
BIBLE CHURCH

Does God
Care ?

By Mitch A. Schultz

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This booklet is dedicated to the memory of
Travis Andrew Schultz
Born November 19, 1986
Died August 22, 1999

He lived a brief
But full life

*God I pray thee, light these idle sticks of my life, that I might burn for thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is thine.
I seek not a long life, but a full one for you, Lord Jesus.*

Jim Elliot

Forward

When I first wrote this booklet, just after Travis' death, I never imagined it would have the wide interest it had. I have been deeply encouraged by the many dozens who have written to share their own story, and how this story has both encouraged them and given them courage. Similarly, these letters have served to encourage me and have given me courage.

Since first writing this booklet my family and I have progressed much further down the road to healing and recovery. While our pain over Travis's loss is still as tender as it was the first week, the desire to move on and to serve Jesus has been revived, and the joy of living is beginning to regain its earlier vigor. We accept that while no one can reclaim what has been lost, the ability to accept and move on is possible.

I have written this booklet with two aims in mind. First, I simply want to tell our story. Some consider it an unusual story, but I have discovered that many have suffered, some with much greater intensity than we have. . What I want to surface in my story is that God does Care no matter how intense the pain. Secondly, I want this booklet to draw you to God, to enjoy his embrace, and to treasure his love. I am more convinced, even a year and a half after first writing this booklet, that God does indeed care, and He cares deeply.

I would love to hear from you once you have read this. You will find information in the back of the booklet on how you can contact us at mschultz@AllianceMequon.org

Who is God?

There are many people who have come to the conclusion in their lives that God does not really care that much about them. Situations like the one I am about to share with you has no doubt contributed to such a view of God. When bad things happen to good people, it is difficult to say God is a good and loving God. I want to share with you how my view of God as a loving, involved and caring God has been strengthened, not weakened, because of the trials I and my family have had to face. I have not come to this conclusion easily because I too, have had to reconsider, even after many years of believing and teaching about God, who this God really is.

Tragedy Strikes

The story of our family's series of trials began in late May of 1998 while we were on vacation in the Black Forest in Germany. We had eagerly looked forward to this holiday, knowing it would be our last break before returning to America, after six years of church work in England.

On Friday night, the 29th of May 1998, my wife Elaine went to bed with a tremendous headache and she immediately concluded that an old tooth abscess had returned. Our efforts at sightseeing the next day proved disappointing as her pain grew worse. On Sunday, after Elaine had spent two full days in bed, we called a German doctor who took our word about the tooth abscess, and accordingly prescribed some antibiotics. We chose to stick with our plans to leave that Sunday afternoon for Paris, and stay with some good friends.

As Elaine grew worse, we held firmly to the belief that by the next day the antibiotics would take effect. Two other

doctors called to see Elaine in Paris and continued to treat a tooth abscess; one doctor emphatically confirming that this, in fact, was what she had. Elaine was also prescribed a painkiller. By the middle of that week, Elaine's speech became confused, and the doctor assured us that this was a common side effect from the morphine she was taking. Again, we followed our planned route, and headed for Belgium to visit family, but by now I suspected that Elaine was suffering from something far worse than a tooth abscess. I had no idea what it might be. She was now completely lethargic, moving little and barely speaking.

Not knowing what to do, and reluctant to call another doctor, we opted to rush home, knowing that the trip from Belgium, across the English Channel via the Chunnel, to Manchester could take up to 10 hours. Remarkably, we did it in 8, moving freely around London and Birmingham on a Friday afternoon, when traffic is usually at a standstill. Little did I know that the woman, slumped next to me in the passenger seat, was not just in pain; she was dying! Looking back at those 8 hours, I thank God for keeping me ignorant of her true condition, because in retrospect, the realization of how seriously ill she was, is horrifying. By the time we arrived at our home in Warrington in northwest England, Elaine was completely unconscious. An ambulance came and rushed her to the hospital. I forgave the ambulance driver for suggesting that Elaine was simply exhausted from the long journey. If only he knew what we had been through that week. After 4 hours of tests and doctor visits, the decision was made for Elaine to have a CAT scan. Saturday at 2 a.m. on June 6th I was advised the scan showed a large mass on Elaine's brain. "It looks as though she has an abscess on her brain," I was calmly told. The best neurological Center in Britain, The Walton Center, was just a half hour from Warrington, in Liverpool. At 5 a.m. I found myself in a car driven by the Associate Pastor of the church, chasing the ambulance at a remarkable speed. I felt unusually calm, but kept repeating to Andrew: "My wife might die." At the Walton Center a quick scan confirmed an abscess (so they thought), and the surgeon, having no knowledge of our situation, asked: "Has she recently had a tooth abscess?" "Yes," I said, "she has suffered for two weeks with one." I still shudder when I remember what the doctor said next. "You have to understand, Mr. Schultz," he said, "Elaine is very ill. There is a good chance she will not make it through the operation."

The surgeon later told me that at that moment, Elaine was only one hour from death. The speed by which we were able to make the trip from Belgium to Warrington was now so much more significant. When Elaine arrived at the Walton Center, her pupils were completely fixed, an indication that her brain was extremely swollen. I paced for four hours, made several phone calls to family members, and Andrew, in turn, made many phone calls. I believe that within the hour, and during the operation, hundreds were already praying for Elaine. She was completely in God's hands, and during those hours of anxious waiting, I trusted God. Earlier that night, knowing how serious things were, I anchored myself in this commitment: "Lord, whatever you choose to do, I am willing to accept it." I had to do this and I am glad I did, because in subsequent days and weeks, I could have easily collapsed under the emotional strain. I threw out many anchors onto that commitment and each time they landed on solid ground.

Saturday at 10:30 a.m. the surgeon came into the room, and I could tell immediately from his face that Elaine was alive. "You won't believe this," he began, "*we thought we were treating an abscess but instead we discovered a brain tumor the size of a golf ball behind Elaine's left eye.*" (In the preceding week her eye had remained half shut. We assumed this was because of the tooth abscess). The tumor was later confirmed to be a benign meningioma tumor.

The medical team kept Elaine in a drug induced coma for 3 days to ensure that the swelling in her brain was reduced enough to sustain consciousness. Fortunately, I found out only later that the chances of Elaine suffering a stroke during this time were very high. They also warned me that Elaine would very possibly suffer from severe, permanent brain damage as a result of the tumor and swelling. It was difficult to take in this prognosis, but I realize now the surgeons could not offer me false hope.

Finally on Tuesday, the 9th of June, there was sufficient reduction in the brain swelling that Elaine was released from the drugs that kept her asleep. I naively assumed that within several hours she would wake up, look at me, and say: "What happened? Where am I?" Yet it was another ten days before Elaine finally woke up enough to respond to people around her. During this time, she contracted the super bug infection otherwise known as MRSA, which is resistant to most antibiotics. The infection spread quickly, and struck its hardest blow around the area of the wound. Then Elaine contracted meningitis and the doctors had no option but to perform another operation which involved reopening the wound, cleaning the infection area, and removing the piece of bone over the tumor site which served as breeding ground for the infection.

In the following days and weeks it became quite obvious that Elaine was very confused, disoriented, and unable to express herself. For months, she was unable to communicate clearly. She has had to undergo intense speech therapy

to relearn how to read, write and even speak. She has progressed well, but this path to recovery has been a long and frustrating one. Yet the very fact she is alive is a miracle. Elaine's surgeon later told me that in 30 years as a surgeon, Elaine was the second worst case he had ever seen.

One day when visiting Elaine back at our local hospital in Warrington, I was stopped by an Indian doctor whom I recognized as the doctor who had admitted Elaine when she was rushed to the hospital seven weeks earlier. He expressed his disbelief at seeing the two of us walking down the hallway the previous day. He was amazed at the remarkable progress of her recovery and told me when Elaine was first brought in; the medical team did not think she would make it through the night. I wept and praised God when the doctor said, "The only thing I can say is, this is a miracle." I had to agree with him.

The Story is Not Over

We returned to the States in September to begin what would be at least two years of intense therapy for Elaine. Just one month after our return, when Elaine's progress began to gain momentum, our oldest son Travis began to experience a series of symptoms. Travis was sick to his stomach a lot, began to feel weakness on the right side of his body and complained of double vision. Our family doctor recommended he be seen by a neurologist. Within several minutes of observing Travis, the neurologist concluded that Travis, too, was suffering from a brain tumor. A scan revealed the worst form of brain tumor, a brain stem tumor which could not be operated on. We also found that there is no cure for this sort of tumor and no known report of recovery. We walked from one bad dream into a nightmare with the realization that our son would not live more than five years. I returned home that afternoon in the worst state of shock imaginable. How does one come to terms with such events? I just came through one family tragedy only to take on another. If it had not been for a relatively solid, spiritual foundation I would have sunk into a state of deep despair.

Yet this foundation would reveal some cracks in my understanding of God I could not ignore. My understanding of God would change considerably in the months that followed. I did not cease to believe in him or no longer trust him. He would become more of a mystery to me, no longer a buddy to come to at my convenience, but a Holy awesome God who would receive my respect, trust and complete dependence. In his book *A Grief Observed*, the writer, C. S. Lewis, faced a vastly different God than he had previously known, following the death of his wife. Wondering if God is a cosmic Sadist, Lewis confesses: "*not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about him. The conclusion I dread is not 'So there is no God after all,' but 'So this is what God is really like.'*"

Travis would face the most harrowing ten months of his life. A 12 year old boy should never have to go through what he went through. He was always an extremely athletic boy, excelling in soccer and cross country running. Yet his body, in these ten months, would be subject to about as much as the human body can tolerate. We were told Travis had three months to live without radiation treatment. We began the treatments right away, driving four hours every day for six weeks for a 30 second dose of radiation. Slowly, we began to see changes. For the first month his body weakened under the powerful effects of the radiation treatments. A high dose of steroids made his body swell, giving his face the appearance of a balloon blown up to full capacity. However, in the second month the symptoms began to wane, and by the third month his strength was back and he was running with the same energy he always had. I boasted of his progress by informing everyone of the 17 goals he scored in the seven soccer games he played that spring season. That proved how well he was doing. But then in May, just one week after a scan revealed 70% decrease in the size of the tumor, his symptoms returned with a vengeance.

It took Travis only three months to die. By late June he was in a wheel chair, unable to use his legs. By late July his weakening body could no longer remain propped up in the wheel chair, forcing him to spend the time he had left lying on our couch. His speech deteriorated, he found eating very difficult and he very quickly began to lose the use of his arms.

Facing Death

By mid-August he began to slip slowly into a coma. He spent the last five days of his life in a deep coma. My wife and I were with him when he died. His body was hot, but it was obvious to me that he was no longer there. Before us was the shell that had contained a person, a beautiful child whom I loved so deeply. A father and son can rarely share the depth we shared together. We spoke so easily and openly about everything from death to fishing. My son was eager to die. Sounds odd doesn't it? A 12 year old boy who loved Nintendo, fishing and collecting soccer cards, was eager to die! Just one week before he died I knelt by Travis and told him that thousands were praying for him to be well again. Do you know what he said to me? "*Daddy, I don't want to be healed, I just want to be with Jesus!*" When it became apparent to us, and to Travis, that the reoccurrence of the symptoms meant he would die, I asked

him if he was ready for this. His strong reply still echoes in the chamber of my memory. *"Daddy, I am totally ready to die."*

It became quite apparent to me as I watched my son weaken and begin to face the prospect of death, that here was a young man whose understanding of and love for God took on a new and precious meaning. His faith put mine to shame. It was a practical, no nonsense faith he possessed - one that allowed him to face the worst trial placed before any human - death itself! For ten months I witnessed true faith at work. This was where the rubber of his belief met the road of reality. His faith was not a theory, or some religious acknowledgment. Travis' faith gave him access to God and prepared him to meet that God. **If anyone had a right to cry out that God did not really care, Travis had that right.** But the very opposite happened. I had to face some harsh truths about my own faith. If a twelve year old boy dying with a brain tumor could cling so closely to God, what should I be doing? Watching my son face death forced me to conclude that God does in fact care, and he cares deeply.

An Eternal Perspective

In 1992 Elaine and I moved to England with a simple but clear desire to do what we felt God was leading us to do. Some years before this we both committed our lives to God, to go wherever and do whatever he wanted. Through a long process of waiting we decided to serve God in England. We did not think that England was in desperate need for people like us, or that as Americans, we had something better to offer. Not at all. We just wanted to be in place to make some difference and to be of encouragement to people who might perhaps be disillusioned with Christianity as they see it. We wanted to help those who needed to better understand who God really is.

Our main responsibility in those six years was to pastor the Birchwood Evangelical Church, but we also loved the opportunity to become good friends with many other people in the community. We felt welcomed by people and it did not take long to find ourselves a part of the local scene. We never pushed our faith on anyone. It has always been our quiet desire that our friends see a personal side to God and recognize a Christianity that is often not seen by people. This attitude toward God is often blurred by peoples' discontent or bad experiences with traditional Christianity. It has been our hope that our friends, whether attending church or not, understand that God loves them and longs for them to become a part of his family.

It might seem odd when I say that what has happened to Elaine and Travis doesn't make us angry at God. Rather this crisis has drawn us closer to God. I can speak for Elaine because I know her heart and the depth of her faith in God. There have been times recently when I asked her if all this has made her bitter at God. She is now finally able to communicate well and so her reply held a great deal of conviction. She said, *"Mitch what good would that do?"* You see, the alternative to acceptance and dependence on God is not very attractive. Who in their right mind would prefer a broken relationship over a harmonious one? Imagine a wife saying to her husband, *"Sorry but I would far prefer being mad at you and having a strain in our relationship."* Yet there are many who seem to treat God this way. But what good does it do to be mad at God? Isn't it when you hurt that you need him the most? I think so.

I spent hours in the family rooms at Walton Hospital and the radiation center at Emory Hospital in Atlanta. I had many opportunities to listen in on people's pain and anguish as they too, awaited the recovery of their loved one. I overheard many of these family members let off steam against God. This was often directed my way when they discovered what I do and believe. For many of these families what was happening to them cemented the opinion of God in their hearts that *he is not loving and he doesn't care.* I listened patiently, but also shared that God was extending his loving arms towards me and I was finding great comfort in his embrace. This has been a better option than being angry at God. In fact, being angry at God makes no more sense to me than a child who has stubbed his toe while playing outdoors, taking his anger out on his father when he would benefit far more from his father's hug. Early in Travis's ordeal I asked him if he was OK with all he would have to face. His response showed me someone preferring God's embrace over the distance of bitterness. *"Yes Dad, it is OK because God is in it!"*

What is it that gives us, and other Christians, this perspective to suffering in life? I would like to offer you two reasons why what happened to Elaine and Travis does not make us want to give up, but rather motivates us to press on with God. One has to do with a present relationship; the other has to do with a future promise.

Some years ago, I was tucking my youngest boy, Brett, into bed. Just as I began to pray with him, he interrupted. *"Daddy"*, he said, *"I used to not like God very much!"*

My reply was marked with some apprehension unsure where he was going with this. *"Why is that, Brett?"* I asked. *"Because, I couldn't see him"* was his simple reply. I pressed further. *"Do you mean that now you can see him?"*

"No, but now it doesn't matter."

A Relationship

Brett didn't mean to, but he hit the nail of Christianity on the head with this simple insight. To have a relationship with God does not require that we **see** God, but rather that **we believe** what the Bible says about him, and respond by giving ourselves fully to him. Yet, we cannot become a Christian, nor enter this new relationship, unless we first acknowledge that we are separated from God by that big problem called sin. The Bible describes a gulf that exists between man and God. Man, despite his attempts to bridge that gulf, remains separated from God. This gulf was bridged when Jesus laid down his life across that chasm. To have this relationship with God requires a simple step on our part – that we come to God through Jesus. When my son Travis was just four, he joined a bigger and more lasting family than any he has known here. He asked Jesus to come into his heart to wash him of the sin he was born with. This proved to be a life changing decision that prepared Travis to face anything. This relationship with Jesus is what also gave Travis an eagerness in dying, because he knew who he would finally see face to face beyond the grave.

Until you become a member of God's family, you will probably not accept pain and suffering. You will find yourself doubting God, and even, as many do, rebelling against him. (You've no doubt heard that common statement: *"How can a loving God allow such a thing?"*) To Elaine and me, a friendship with Jesus has always come before physical or personal security. When bad things happen, this friendship does not suffer, instead it grows stronger. A portion from the Bible sketches a beautiful portrait of this bond. *"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 8:38, 39)

Does it seem strange to you that Christians would say they draw closer to God in hardship? To the Christian, what matters more than health or personal security is a friendship with Jesus. So when bad things do happen, we need that friendship far more than when things were going well. I'll take his embrace rather than the distance that comes from being angry at him.

I recently read a book about a missionary working in Indonesia who was interned by the Japanese for five years during WW II. Her first anguish in this trial was to be separated from her husband when he and the other men were taken to another camp. She had no word of him for over a year, until one day someone informed her that he had died three months earlier. She was crushed. She would have collapsed and given up all desire to live if it had not been for her deep conviction that one day she would be reunited with him and, more importantly, with her Lord Jesus. Today Darlene Deibler is in her 80's and it won't be long before this longing is realized.

Promise of Better Days

It is that hope of life after this life, that promise God gives us in the Bible, that keeps Christians going in the hardest of times. Christians hold to the promise that death is not the end, but there is more, far more, when it is all over here. It is that sort of HOPE that enables Christians to say, *"I don't understand, but I accept this"*, when they lose a loved one, and *"It will all work out for the better in the end,"* when things on earth don't go their way. This doesn't mean Christians don't experience anguish and deep pain. For example, I am vulnerable like everyone else. I have found my crisis to be overwhelming and emotionally exhausting. At certain points I have felt too weak to move on. Even the smallest tasks have seemed too much. Yet, it is the hope of something more which helps me live through the pain. We call this endurance.

That is what keeps me going and what gives me hope. I admit that right now things are not at all what I want for us. I never planned for this and can honestly say I don't like it very much. I would love to be able to snap my fingers and see Elaine fully restored and have my son back at my side. However, there are some things I cannot change. So I live for that day when it will be all right again, and even better than we ever had it before. Absorb this image from the Bible for just a moment; *"And I heard a voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'*" (Revelation 21:3, 4)

I hope you understand this future promise is only available to those who have put their trust in Jesus. It makes sense to me that people who ignore Jesus in this life, should not expect much of a break after this life. Elaine and I have had one simple desire from all our friendships during the years we have lived in England and America: That we will be able to enjoy eternity together.

Does God really care? What about when life hurts? Can I truthfully say God cares when my hopes and dreams are shattered?

I have tried to show that suffering deepens our relationship with God and increases our longing for heaven. If this is true then I have to conclude that God does care. He hurts when I hurt. He shares my sorrow over Travis' death. Best of all he longs for me to reach out to him and to enjoy his embrace. This could not happen had I not experienced this trial. Suffering has a way of making us reach out to God. It is when we are broken and crying that we need him most; only then will we truly value his friendship.

I trust what you have read in these pages will prompt you to consider your own view of God. God is a loving father who treats and loves me as his son. My agony over Travis' suffering is only a small taste of God's response to all of us when we hurt. The close relationship Travis and I had in those painful months is really a picture of what God wants to experience with you. The Bible calls God, **the God of all comfort**. He cares for us in our pain far more than I ever could have cared for Travis. God cares so much for us the Bible says he gave his life for us so we can be restored to him.

Does God care? Well, the proof that he does lies in the fact that he sent Jesus to die in our place so that we can enjoy a friendship with him and live forever in heaven with him.

Letters and Songs

Through the year of Travis' illness I kept an extensive journal. Most of this is currently being edited for possible book form. I include below two letters I wrote when his symptoms returned and we knew he would face death. This is followed by an entry from my journal the day Travis died, along with some things others have written. These letters reveal my deep love for Travis and the depth of my pain over his death. I urge you to read these with God as a loving, caring father in mind.

Last letters to my son

July 10, 1999

My Dear Travis,

This is the letter I knew I might have to write you some day. I have not wanted to write it but I know I must. You are dying. I don't know how many more of these letters I will write.

Your symptoms worsened and a little over a week ago we found out that your tumor has begun to grow again. The surgeon in Atlanta told us you would worsen and in several months you might die. We sought a second opinion from a surgeon in Athens, GA and he confirms this. In fact, his opinion is that you will not make it to Christmas. I do not know if I can honestly absorb this. I can not imagine life without you. Already it hurts me to see boys running with such ease and playing soccer. You can hardly walk now and it becomes worse every day. You are now in a wheel chair and using a walker to move around the house.

I don't feel desperate but I am aware of the pending emotions that lie ahead. They wait, looming over us until the moment you are gone. Coming down the stairs and you won't be there. Calling out your name and catching myself that there is no one there to respond. Imagining what you would be like five, ten, fifteen years from now. Celebrating your birthday without you. Missing you terribly at Breanna and Brett's weddings. All these are deep emotions waiting to fall on us.

I know you will be with Jesus, Travis. I am jealous of you. It will be more real than anything you have experienced here. You will really be there, Travis. Spiritual reality is more real than our reality. Oh, my son, you will see Him – Our Lord. You will never know pain, you will know nothing but joy and peace – you will be free.

I hurt for you now but if it is to happen, I long that it will be soon. I do not want to see you hurt. You are so strong. Never complaining. Frustrated but not angry. I admire you deeply. You are an example to me, Travis. At the pond two days ago, you tried to throw a ball but it never left your hand. You turned away and said, "*Oh well, there are more important things in life anyway.*"

I plead with God to heal you. I remind him that your condition is no different than all those people Jesus healed in the Bible. I ask God what is different with you that He will not respond to you like he did to those fortunate ones. Healing would bring such glory to God.

Travis, God has used you to break me. I am a broken man. Sometimes I wonder what would have become of me had none of this pain come my way this last year. He has purified me. There are no facades, no need for affirmation and applause. I will never be the same. Whatever happens, I will serve Jesus with all my heart, soul, and strength. And I will do so limping.

I want to prepare you to meet Jesus in the time that is left should He not heal you. But I don't know how. It seems more like **you** are preparing **me**. You are prepared, I am not. We speak together about dying but I am cautious to say too much. I wish you asked questions but you say little about it. Perhaps you have no questions. God will help us prepare.

You are so tired today. You're on the couch right now sleeping next to me. The USA play China today in Women's Soccer finals. Viviane, my sister and her family will join us. It has been so special to watch you and Melanie together along with your other cousins, Sarah and Jason. It is hard on them. They love you so much. I will close now and write you later.

I love you,
Your Daddy

August 17

My Dearest Travis,

You have been in a coma now for five days. The last time you responded to me was at Lake Lanier, near Atlanta where we spend three days thanks to Make A Wish Foundation.

I just checked your temperature and it registered 106.5. I don't know if you are aware of yourself or your surroundings. Your mom and I are right now standing over you and we just completed a good discussion about dying. D. H. came this morning with McDonalds breakfast and commented that he wonders if the Spirit leaves for Jesus before the body dies. That is what your Mom and I just debated. Mom said, "*No, I don't believe that. Jesus went through it all the way at the cross till the end and so do we.*" It is so good to hear your Mom expressing her thoughts and opinions.

So many people drop by. P.M. came by with his mom yesterday and he wept. I was so moved by this I placed my arms around him and encouraged him to remember the commitment to Jesus you had made. Apparently he has taken this very hard. Other gestures of love and concern have moved me deeply. Over 200 cards made by 6-7 graders from your school. Also, they called for an early morning prayer meeting just for you. Over 100 kids attended.

I wonder what death will be like for you. You will not know it as death like we do. To you it will mean life – Eternal life and the presence of Jesus. Travis, soon you will see him face to face. The Holy God of Israel and of the church whom no one could see face to face and live. You will see that face and you will live as you never knew life here. But I wonder! What will it be like? God has kept the details from us, but the hope for it is so real and strong. The Scriptures have wet our appetites and when we refuse to live by the flesh our longing for heaven runs deep within our souls.

I read Psalm 23 the other day and for the first time saw it as a Psalm of death. Our Shepherd leads us to *green pastures* and *calm waters*. Only after death is our *soul truly restored*. As believers we need not fear death. Jesus has conquered death. Following that valley where death hangs only like a shadow is *a table prepared* just for you. There is your home. You are ready for it. A feast awaits you my son and someday, a real day, will come when I will join you. Taste the food for me and save me a place.

I love you, Daddy

Sunday, Aug. 22

This morning at 2 o'clock Travis joined the Lord Jesus. He was welcomed by a cheering crowd and escorted by the angels down a path into the presence of his Lord and Savior. The Lord Jesus placed his arms around Travis and together they laughed as Travis never laughed before. They sat at a table and ate together waited on by angels especially assigned to this task.

Elaine and I slept downstairs only several feet from Travis. For several nights we slept that way and the heavy breathing from his bed often kept me awake. On many occasions I would kneel next to him and hold him close. His

body was warm but this was the only sign of life. There were many moments when the agonizing sounds of his breathing burdened me. I urged Travis to let go, telling him that Jesus was there waiting to take him. *Go on Travis, I would cheer. Take his hand, he wants you.* Well, last night the breathing stopped and I jolted awake rushing to his side. He had just left us. My immediate reaction was to break out with the Doxology and Elaine joined me. This was not planned, but spontaneous. I was thankful to God for bringing this trial to an end and releasing my son into glory. The image of his lifeless body and later the somber scene of men in black carrying his body up the stairs will remain etched on the screen of my mind. Yet that was no longer my son. This was only his shell the container that contained Travis Andrew Schultz for 12 wonderful years. His spirit was gone and so the body no longer means anything to us. It must be discarded.

I cannot understand death. I cannot understand why Travis was taken so soon. Yet, the moment he died I rushed to his side and felt a deep joy for him but yes, also for me. Travis' death increases my longing to see Jesus too. A reunion awaits me. It seems so clear right now. *O Lord, don't let this clarity be lost. Keep the fog and mist that hides this reality away. Travis is with Jesus.* We are left, to miss him yes! But to continue in service to our King.

My time, our time, here is so short. It will seem like only minutes when we too join those around that table. I can't wait but I know that I must.

The book "Fires of Sorrow" written by Mitch Schultz gives the expanded version of the story.

Heaven's Soccer Team

(Written by a friend of Travis and read during his funeral)

You were a center striker in the soccer team of life.

You played the game with all you had; you were our teams shining light.

God saw you getting winded, and a cure was not to be found. So he put his arms around you and whispered, "Come with me".

With tearful eyes we watched you, and saw you fade away. We needed you in this game but we knew we couldn't make you stay.

So when we saw you resting so peacefully without pain, we could not wish you back to play with us again.

A courageous heart stopped beating, our striker went to rest. God took him to prove to us he only takes the best.

In life we miss you dearly; in death we love you still. On our team you hold a special place; no one else could ever fill.

Now that you're in heaven, Travis do this one thing for me. Save me a place up on the right wing, of heaven's soccer team.

-Andrew Wiese 8th grade

Big House

(This song was Travis' favorite and was played at his funeral)

*I don't know where you eat your meals or where you talk on the telephone.
I don't know if you got a cook, a butler, or a maid.
I don't know if you got a yard with a hammock in the shade.
I don't know if you got a place where you can run and hide.
I don't know if you live with friends in whom you can confide.
I don't know if you live with a family, say a mom or dad.
I don't know if you feel love at all but I bet you wish you had.*

*Come, and go with me, to my father's house.
Come, and go with me, to my father's house.
It's a big, big house, with lots and lots of room.
A big, big table with lots and lots of food.
A big, big yard, where we can play football.
It's a big, big house.
It's my Father's house.*

*All I know is it's a big ole house with room for everyone.
All I know its got lots of land, where we can play and run.
All I know is that you're all alone, and I've got a family.
All I know is that you need love, so why not come with me?*

*Come, and go with me, to my father's house.
Come, and go with me, to my father's house.
It's a big, big house, with lots and lots of room.
A big, big table with lots and lots of food.
A big, big yard, where we can play football.
It's a big, big house.
It's my Father's house.*

@1993 / Stuart McGinnis, Herman / Up In The Mix Music / BMI /

My First Christmas in Heaven

(This poem was written by a 13 year old boy who died on December 14, 1997 after a four year battle with a brain tumor. He wrote this poem for his mother.)

I see the countless Christmas trees around the world below with tiny lights, like Heaven's stars, reflecting on the snow.

The sight is so spectacular; please wipe away the tear for I am spending Christmas with Jesus Christ this year.

I hear the many Christmas songs that people hold so dear, but the sound of music can't compare with the Christmas choir up here.

I have no words to tell you, the joy their voices bring, for it is beyond description, to hear the angels sing.

I know how much you miss me; I see the pain inside your heart. But I am not so far away, we really aren't apart.

So be happy for me, dear ones, you know I hold you dear. And be glad I'm spending Christmas with Jesus Christ this year.

I sent you each a special gift from my heavenly home above. I sent you each a memory of my undying love.

After all, love is a gift more precious than pure gold. It was always most important in the stories Jesus told.

Please love and keep each other, as my father said to do. For I can't count the blessing or love He has for each of you.

So have a Merry Christmas and wipe away that tear. Remember, I am spending Christmas with Jesus Christ this year.

Press On

Through this trial I have found music to be a great source of comfort. One of my favorite artists is a Christian contemporary singer, Billy Sprague. He appropriately touches the mood of the saddened heart in his song "Press On". I conclude with the words to this song which he wrote after his fiancé was tragically killed in a car accident.

*I was down in the valley of the shadow of death
When the passion for life drained like blood from my chest
And it took more than my will just to take a step
When the compass of hope was gone*

*In silence so black that I wished for the blues
Every desperate prayer seemed like Heaven refused
And some days I found faith meant just tying my shoes
And it was all I could do to press on.*

*Press ON, mi amigo
Press ON, mon Ami
Walk on in the face of the mystery
Though the night hides the light
Through the darkness till dawn
Tie your shoes, my dear friend ... and press ON*

*On the ocean so lonesome I was not left alone
Had some heavyweight friends when my heart was a stone
And they carried the heartache and made it their own
When the currents of sorrow were strong*

*One said, 'I pray your memories will not drag you down
Not be anchors but treasures of the love that you have found'
And his kind words turned the hurt into comfort somehow
And a wind in the sails to press on.*