

Ben Kredich Reflections

Thank you. I speak for our whole family when I say that we are filled with gratitude. We are grateful for every thought or prayer, every gesture or act. We are grateful for the **small** gestures – that of sharing a smile or hug, of sending texts, notes, letters, the expression of condolences and sharing of stories. We are as well overwhelmed by the **herculean acts**, such as the University of Tennessee putting this service together, or what Ben's dear friend Josiah Klouda, who works for Mynatt Funeral Home, did to care for Ben's body after his death - transporting it, embalming it so the family could have one more moment together with him looking so handsome, and then cremating it. We are grateful for everyone doing what they could do to be here in person or in spirit to celebrate the life of my beloved son, Ben Kredich.

We are grateful for the **gift** that was Ben.

We are immensely grateful for what he did for our family. Feeling the **loss** of Ben requires us to try to **comprehend** “the gift of Ben”, and all I can tell you is that right now, the gift of Ben is far beyond my comprehension.

Today I would like to share with you all a few things about Ben and Ben's life. There are actually so, so many more than a few things I want to share with you about Ben, so please forgive my clumsiness if I try to slip in just one more thing, but I'll keep it to just a few. First, I'd like to continue to paint a picture of Ben's world, and ask you to live there for just a bit. Second, I want to share my perspective on the impact he had on this world. And finally I would like to share with you *how* I believe he did this, *why* he did this, and then maybe what we can do with all of this.

This week I think we've all been blessed to hear so many stories of Ben's interactions with people. Let's take a moment here. The fact that those stories exist **at all** is worthy of a *spectacular celebration*. There was a time in our lives when, if someone had told us that these interactions would have, or could have occurred, we would have thought they were speaking of magic. But Ben's life and world **were magical**. His world was, and is, a place where all animals speak freely, with accents, idioms, and inside jokes. It's a world where dogs speak in their native language of "Barkish", and if you're lucky, sometimes their speech comes with subtitles. It is a world where **time** can actually be slowed down, reversed, or frozen, and one where the channels between heaven and earth are *wide* open.

So I want to share with you a word to consider, and then a couple of stories.

Ben delighted in **words** – a few people know the sheer delight he displayed when Ben heard a word that he never had heard before and shouted with celebratory joy, **"THAT'S a new word!"**

The word I'd like to consider today is **resonance**. It has a few definitions, but this one is from the realm of physics, having to do with sound.

Resonance is defined as a reinforcement of sound (as a musical tone) in a vibrating body, caused by waves from another body, vibrating at nearly the same rate. That is resonance.

Now a story. This story happened on a day when our family was in Florida on a training trip with the Richmond Women's Swimming Team. It was just before Ben turned three, he was struggling mightily. We continued to see him withdrawing more and more into himself. He lived with tons of frustration, and that frustration would turn *torturous*

for him and so many times we simply didn't know why. But here's the thing we experienced over and over with Ben. On a day that first seems like any other, he would reveal, or discover, something *extraordinary* that could change his life trajectory. This would be one of those days. Kim had noticed that Ben sometimes seemed to be **delighted** by others' singing, and other times **tortured** by the **same** person singing the **same** song. So Kim, driven by the awesome power of a mother's love, discovered on this particular day that what mattered most was not the singer or the song, but the KEY that the song was being sung in. This particular song was "The Potty Song" – if she sang it in C, because he had learned it in "C", he was in heaven. If you sang it in any other key he would be, confused, upset, even furious. You see his toys were all in the key of C, and so as Kim said, if you sang Twinkle Twinkle in "C", the world was right. **Resonance**. If you sang Twinkle Twinkle in D, it was like the world around him started spinning backwards and sideways – up was down and red was green, it was disorienting and simply *not right*. This realization from Kim was our first clue that Ben's primary world was made of sounds, of tones, of vibrations. Music was not just a part of the universe, it WAS the universe. Life is, in fact, **energy**, and energy is, in fact, waves, or **vibrations**. How must it have felt when Ben realized that Kim understood this, and that finally *someone* GOT HIM? Kim freed him on that day. He finally **resonated** with a person and that person found him. She opened him to a world where intentional communication with human beings was, at the very least, possible.

Now a moment. It is one of my most vivid memories. It was a few months before the moment I just spoke of. It was one of the first warm days of the spring of 2001 at our home in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Ben and Miles had just turned 2, Kim was very pregnant with Coleman, and my swim season was over and on a bit of a break. It was clear at that time that Ben was behind developmentally, and he was getting more frustrated and agitated more often, with more and more intensity. He had been really frustrated that morning, crying hard for a lot longer

than we were ready for. Eventually we took the boys outside in the yard where Miles was happy and Ben, dressed in just a diaper, started to wind down and found some toys to play with in the grass. I was sitting, exhausted, in a chair under a young oak tree just large enough to provide some dappled shade, appreciating the calm. After playing for a bit, Ben made his way over to me, climbed up into my lap, laid down on my chest, let me hug him, and he simply relaxed. I could feel him melting into me. We breathed together. The tension went out of both of our bodies. The sun was bright but just warm and the breeze was slight but just cool. I saw and **felt** a sudden surge of light, energy, and joy, in a way I had never felt before.

I had an overwhelming sense that I felt the presence of the Divine. I knew that was a moment that I would remember for the rest of my life.

Ben gave me this moment.

This, to me, is **resonance**.

The reinforcement of a vibration from one body by another body vibrating at the same frequency. He became me, and I became him. And I know in my heart that he felt this too.

A year or two later, I felt the same thing, again in a long long hug under the warm sun. And then again, and again. I felt it with enough frequency that I knew I could feel it again, and I **KNEW** he felt it too. As years went on I decided he needed a hug every day I saw him, because even if we did not find that same **resonance**, every hug brought us just a bit closer to it. And more recently I realized I could find that **resonance** with him without touching – by laughing with him, walking with him, paddling in rhythm with him, or listening into the same song with him. I lived for those moments and will always cherish them.

Ben's world was sound, vibration. The whole universe vibrates, and I think Ben was in tune with much more of the universe than I even knew existed. From this young age, he could easily resonate with animals, he

could resonate with sticks, strings, and pans. He could resonate with city skylines. But **people, people** were tough for him. People are different, much more unpredictable. **People** were going to be a puzzle that he would have to solve.

A few months after this first experience in the sun, in August of 2001, Kim and I were on a long drive back to our new home in Richmond from the doctor's office in Charlottesville, stunned. We had just received the dreaded diagnosis of **autism** and the pamphlet that came with it, published in 1989, that not only painted a bleak picture of what a child with autism **was**, but it painted a bleak picture of what a child with autism **COULD BECOME**. By the end of the drive Kim and I had come to a few conclusions, and that ridiculous pamphlet had been discarded. What we concluded:

1) The child sitting happily in the back seat was the same child that was in the back seat that morning on the way **to** the doctors' office *before* he was called autistic, and WE knew that child better than anyone.

2) What we knew about him was that he was working really, really hard to figure out the world. He did not like being unhappy and had a fire inside of him to find joy and understanding of the world.

3) He found **joy** in many things, including people, but **people** were the hardest to crack.

4) We remembered that he did two things every day - he learned and he found happiness. So, how in the world could his life be as bleak as the pamphlet predicted, if all of these things were true? We were sure there was hope and the possibility of a great life ahead for him. And dang it, we were right.

Our lives are punctuated by **moments**. Moments of insight, delight, and joy, and these moments forge memories. The stories that we keep

hearing of people's precious moments with Ben, as well as the hundreds of millions of moments that our family spent loving him and being loved by him, have left me with a clear conclusion, that **Ben Kredich brought out the best in people**. The very, very best in people. Ben did this in two ways. First, he *drew* people in. He was physically beautiful. An angelic face, eyelashes so long and thick they didn't seem real. Ben also **spoke** and **acted** just differently enough so that he pulled your attention towards him.

Once he had your attention though, the second way he brought out the best in people is that he sought to find **resonance** that person.

In his immediate family, the qualities that we needed to connect with Ben are the ones that each of us have developed to the highest level, and in these past few days of mourning, these qualities that Ben helped each of us develop have shone through in my family triumphantly. He looked for these things in us, he challenged us to bring these qualities out, and ***when we were at our best, we all found this resonance with Ben.***

From Kim Kredich came superhuman creativity, bravery, strength, endurance, the awesome power of a mother's love.

From Coleman Kredich came extraordinary Patience, Empathy, Kindness, Humor, and the ability to find and connect with *anyone*.

From Miles Kredich - came vivid and fantastical imagination, creativity, musicality, the ability to find, connect, and resonate with *anyone*.

His teachers, most of whom spent one year with him, felt inspired to bring their absolute best to those single years with him, and boy did they shine. I would imagine each person has a similar indelible memory of resonance with Ben. His friends who went through many years of school with him developed that ability to connect with Ben, and I am confident that they have given their gifts of empathy and emotional

intelligence to all of the people they love as much as they gave it to Ben.

Those who were willing to move in his direction, towards resonance, were rewarded. How wonderful was it to see him maybe for the second time in your life and have him remind you that you are from Chattanooga? How warm would you feel when he might ask you where your son Liam is, or if your cat Reese has been behaving? He knew some thing about every one. This was not a party trick, and I'm sure it wasn't easy for him. When he met you for the first time he would immediately start searching for a way to connect. He wanted to find some frequency upon which to meet you. Where are you from? Where were you born? What is your birthday? If music was playing he might ask you if you know the song, or if you know the artist or even some other song that the artist was playing. This was not a show of knowledge, it was a search for connection.

One might wonder why – why did he search so hard to find this connection with people when instruments, animals, and musical programs on his phone were so much easier? I know the answer and it is as true for Ben as it is for any one of us.

It was to find his way out of loneliness.

I cry for the loss of Ben, and I also cry for the moments when I know he was lonely. Connection and resonance is hard. It's hard for all of us, but it is so much harder for people like Ben who have disabilities that affect what we think of as normal ways to connect. Kim's advocacy, Miles and Coleman's long conversations with him on the phone, in his apartment, in their cars, the resolve of so many of us to talk with him any time he wanted to talk, those were all to help him escape loneliness. The challenges of his years ahead were going to include the challenge of making and keeping friends, finding resonance with people in the world

where his path was not as clear as it is when one is in school. That was where our vision and efforts were focused, and now that Ben is no longer with us, we can choose to bring similar vision and focus to those who need it most. So for those in our lives who find it harder to connect, please consider what it would take to resonate with them, even if just for a moment.

As for our family, we will keep looking for the best in each other and in those we love, know, and meet, looking for resonance and connection, and honoring Ben's legacy.

I know Ben is in Heaven now, and I know that his Heaven is a place where everyone is in tune, where dogs sing with trees, and everything is in the right key.

Ben brought heaven to earth for me, and I hope we can each do the same for each other. I love you Ben and I'll be with you every day.