

Hans Zimmerman's Eulogy Brigitte Zimmerman

Many of you know of Hans' medical challenges, but Hans disliked being viewed as a sum of symptoms and conditions on a medical chart. On behalf of Hans, I'd like to offer you a window into the wonderful person Hans was. It is my hope that you will carry these memories of Hans forward after today, remembering his magnetic personality and caring spirit instead of his suffering.

Hans cherished all living things. Animals and children were drawn to Hans. Whether picking dandelions in the yard to prevent them from being mowed over, giving Christmas presents every year to Carie's beautiful cats, or writing letters to protect wolves in Northern Minnesota, Hans was ready to assist all animals. Hans was the gentle soul who could quiet traumatized foster children and was the energetic being who could match Fiona's enthusiasm for running around the house in an everlasting game of tag.

Hans was instantly forgiving and entirely nonjudgmental. In the midst of family conflict, Hans was always the peacemaker, ready to give one of his gentle hugs or ask if someone was okay or simply sit quietly together. I will never know anyone who upheld the idea of "turning the other cheek" or forgiving "70x7" times as much as Hans did. Hans forgave family members and online scammers with equal grace. Whenever my dad ranted about lying presidential candidates, Hans was there to say, "It's a hard job. I think they're trying."

Hans was devoted in a completely selfless way. Our trials were his trials, and our happinesses were his happinesses in the depths of his soul. When our niece Peyton unjustly got reprimanded at school for standing up for another student, Hans was ready to write letters to the school board on her behalf. Among my most salient memories from growing up with Hans were his nighttime prayers. Hans had a lot of family, friends, children, strangers, animals, and causes to pray for, so his prayers took a long time. Hans developed an auctioneer style of praying to get through everything: "God bless Freddie, Carie, Christina, Mom and Dad, Brigitte and Hans, Carie's cats, the Malmquists...."

Hans was a thoughtful and generous caregiver. Whether refurbishing Steve's computer, making me a pros and cons list kit, offering a pat on the shoulder when we were sad to be in the hospital for his birthday, or simply lending an ear when I needed relationship advice, Hans was for his loved ones at all times. He would frequently remind the rest of us, "Don't worry. It will be okay," and of course he always knew exactly when we needed to hear that. Hans was also a generous caregiver for strangers. My parents are appropriate tippers, but Hans still frequently took a few dollars from his state disability payments to leave on the table for the waiter, adding to the tip my parents left. He genuinely asked each person he encountered, "How are you doing?", especially those people that are unlikely to be asked this question very often.

Hans was an athlete. He loved to play ball with anyone, at any time. His favorite sport was soccer, even though one of his eighth grade essays on display here states it was "any sport with a spherical object." When Hans was about eight, after a day in which Christina, Hans and I played indoor soccer and broke the crystal chandelier, Hans said his bedtime prayers: "Dear God, please help me not to play ball in the house. Or if I do, please help me to keep it low."

Hans was ambitious and determined. He loved talking about what he wanted to do when he felt better, and he made all the preparations he could, requesting materials, purchasing textbooks, and talking with others that shared his goals. Early in life, we had plans to open a one-stop-shop for people and animals: a joint primary care (me) and veterinary (Hans) practice. We thought it was a brilliantly convenient business model.

Hans loved foreign languages, and many of his goals centered around learning and using language. If you asked him what he wanted to be lately, he'd say, "a pop singer in Asia."

Hans was vivacious. No matter what his life held, Hans loved his life and wanted to live it to the fullest. Just the day before he passed away, Hans mustered all the energy he had to move to the couch next to the Christmas tree and watch his nieces and nephews open presents. Hans got excited about egg noodles, Glee songs, Guitar Hero, grocery shopping, singing in the car, figuring out the criminal on Law & Order, Christmas trees, the smell of the ocean in Sanibel Island, and a million other small joys in life.

Hans was both witty and silly. When we were toddlers, Freddie taught Hans and I to blow the wrappers off straws across the room, and Hans thought it was the grandest thing. Even at age 28, he was always on hand for his nieces and nephews to crack a joke or do a funny dance. Just last week, Hans and I got a kick out of writing clever word bubbles to tape above the figures in the nativity set.

Hans was brilliant. He shared my father's gift for engineering, and Hans needed only a short period to examine any machine before understanding how it worked. When we were in high school and I was taking AP Physics, I once had to build a self-propelled boat. After about eight failed attempts, Hans gave it a try and finished the boat in about 20 minutes, much to the chagrin of the three of us in the group. Impressively patient, Hans did homework with the triplets, explained the inner workings of the internet to my mother, and told me literally 20 times how to recognize an HDMI cable ("Brigitte, it's the one that looks like a trapezoid." "Hans, what does a trapezoid look like?!"). He was one of the only intelligent people I've met who never fell prey to the trap of using big words, disdaining people who don't understand things as quickly, or bragging about his accomplishments.

Hans was an individual. Hans knew who he was at an early age, and when people didn't appreciate him, he didn't change himself. I used to wish he would try to fit in, because I didn't want him to get bullied. It was only this week that I realized how proud I am of him for all the years that he just was who he was, no matter what happened to him in this world. Once people got to know him, they wanted him around all the time. He had an infectious laugh, was always ready to crack a joke, and had great questions to ask of everyone.

Most of all, Hans was loving and well loved. The exchanges of love between Hans and any member of our family are endless in number. Hans expressed his love with his words, deeds, and support. Anyone who knows our family knows that Mom and Hans had a remarkable bond. They would end every interaction with, "I love you and I always will. Remember that." They were on the same team with everything, and each was constantly thinking of the other in a mutual caregiving relationship. When my mom was sick a few weeks ago, our sister Carie instantly knew to go to Hans, to be there when he realized it had been a few hours since Mom checked in with him and he would start to worry. I know Hans is looking down hoping everyone in this room does the same for our mom now, that we're ready to care for her as Hans would have.

Hans and I were different, but for some reason our differences almost always created harmony, rarely conflict. When I wanted a nonjudgmental listener, I went to him. When he wanted an overbearing list-maker, he came to me. He was always a mirror for me as to how I wanted to change and improve. And now, after he's moved on to a better life, he can still be that mirror. As I attempt to go on, I pray that I can emulate Hans' strengths, which were completely inherent for him but hopefully can be cultivated in me. My hope is to enable Hans to live on by being a little more like him. I would like to ask each person here to do the same.