

“For long years a bird in a cage. Now, flying along with the clouds of heaven.”

A light has gone out, and today the world is a little darker. The nights are cold, the days are short, and in a time of deep grieving and suffering we are trying to find meaning in life and peace in our hearts. Today I remember my little brother's life, and, I hope, to help find for us all some small comfort in this dark time.

I was the first person in my family to hold Fischer when we adopted him from Colombia in 1999. Although I was rather hostile to the idea of people paying attention to someone else in the family besides me, I quickly grew fond of him. When I was in the backyard fighting dragons and climbing castle walls, he was right there next to me. Fischer and I always spent time together outside, running around the neighborhood streets barefoot and spending many hours playing games with our neighborhood friends. He was always eager to prove that he was my equal, doing his best to blur the lines of “older” and “younger” so that we were one and the same. This, naturally, annoyed me to no end, and our sibling rivalry was nothing short of notorious. Fischer and I both had too much pride and were too stubborn, and that often led to some very intense and very personal wrestling/boxing matches. And that's why I was so fond of him: he was always ready to prove himself and his worth. I will, one time only, admit this: he was always the better soccer player than I was. His ferocity in life never tired. He was always running, jumping, or climbing somewhere. I pretended I could keep up with him but in all honesty I was easily exhausted. Although I'm not proud of it, I

remember one summer at the State Fair in which I begged to ride in the stroller while Fischer was more than happy to walk for the day.

Life with Fischer was never boring. He loved to do the most dangerous things just to see what might come out of it. He's been guilty of setting off smoke bombs on our deck, jumping off our garage roof onto his trampoline, and setting our alley on fire. I remember one day in particular in which he walked into my room with a cotton ball in his mouth. Before I had the chance to say anything, he produced a match, lit it, set the cotton ball on fire and then smiled at me so that his teeth were glowing from the light of the flame. That was Fischer all over: the things that seemed so ridiculous to us were so exciting to him. He loved to push the boundaries of life just to see if they would bend. He lived his life with such energy and purpose, there was no point in trying to slow him down, you just had to keep up. There was a time where he convinced me it would be a good idea that I should jump off the roof of my house onto a bed of pillows that he would fashion at the bottom. Thankfully my mother intervened before I got to see the inside of a emergency room, but according to my mom I never looked so relieved in my life.

My childhood memories of him are bright but are also somewhat blurred because of how we grew up together; we did so much and we always did it so quickly. Though I was always active and always excited to be doing things, Fischer always took that excitement and expanded it into a eagerness that I could barely match. That was an eagerness that he carried with him his whole life, even while he struggled with his depression. Though he was suffering in his mind, he gave his activities and his life all of his effort. It was nothing short of astonishing.

The thing I will most remember about him was his smile. I've never seen someone's eyes light up like his did when he smiled. And his laugh. So genuine, so loud, coming up from the bottom of his belly and exploding into a cacophony of happiness. Sometimes he couldn't stop laughing, so much that he forgot what he was laughing about. And when he realized he had forgot, that was even funnier to him. I think that's what living in the moment means, when your joy is so complete you cannot let it go. I'm glad he taught me that.

I would now like to take this time to speak directly to all of Fischer's friends and teammates who are gathered here today. Fischer loved each and every one of you. It isn't any more complicated than that. I can't even begin to express how much it means to my family and I that you were there for him, always. I must apologize because I don't even know half of your names, but that just goes to show how many friends he had. It seemed like every day he had a new friend over at our house. His popularity is ironic because he used to say that I was the favored one that everyone liked. When I asked him what he was doing for New Year's last year, he said "Well... there's a Central party, a Highland party, a Como party, a Cretin party, and an Eagan party I can go to." When I was his age I was lucky if I even knew of ONE party to go to. I've never come close to touching as many lives as he did. Hundreds of people knew him, and dozens called him friend. I'm so grateful that he had all of you. You accepted who he was with open arms and loving hearts, and that's a gift that so few receive. Even though he was full of loneliness, I am comforted in knowing that he was surrounded by so many kind and generous hearts. Thank you.

I think I should address the burning question all of you probably have in your minds right now. Could I have done more? Was there something I could have said to have prevented this? Take a second to realize how many people are gathered here, how many hearts are hurting because of their love for Fischer. He was cherished and accepted by an astonishing number of people. It's okay to have feelings of doubt and guilt. Recognize them, but know that they are misplaced. I am firm in my belief that those in Fischer's life did their best and loved him to their utmost capacity. We must understand that Fischer was fighting many battles at once. To begin with, adoption can bring a struggle with identity. Sometimes it's hard to feel normal when all of your friends have Moms and Dads who gave birth to them, but you don't. Fischer's depression in itself was a frighteningly deep darkness. Coupled with coming out as a transgender male, my little brother was fighting against incredibly unfair enemies in his mind. To even come out was absolutely courageous of him. To be loved as he was after he came out is immensely profound. But as loved and accepted as he was, he could not see beyond the veil and find that same love and acceptance for himself. It was depression that claimed Fischer's life, and despite the immense tragedy surrounding that fact, it does no good to blame ourselves or have guilt consume us. There was no way of knowing or understanding the deepest extremities of his struggle.

My brother did not give up on life. When people hear the word suicide sometimes they generalize it to the thought of someone who has given up on living. But that was not Fischer. He was never one to give up on anything in his life, no matter how challenging and difficult it was for him. Despite the vigor that he had for life and all the people that

were there for him, I think Fischer was convinced that this life was not going to be a place where he could live in peace, or feel normal. Although he has most certainly left us too soon, I hope he has found his peace. I will gladly live with this emptiness in my heart for the rest of my life if it means my little brother has finally found serenity.

So how do we go on? I know right now we feel hopeless, struggling to find meaning in a life that seems so unfair. We can honor Fischer by returning to the virtues of humanity that we seem to have forgotten as a society. Love. Tolerance. Acceptance.

Compassion. Kindness. We harbored all of these things for Fischer, but there are many LGBTQ youth like him who are suffering needlessly in a society that seems either unwilling or unable to accept them. It is so because we do not accept ourselves. Our insecurities blind us, make us weak and lash out at those who are vulnerable. This cannot stand. The time is long past for intolerance, it can no longer be allowed to exist as a normality. We must open our hearts fully, completely, unquestioning. True love knows not race, sex, or gender orientation, and we are all deserving of it. Love is the thing that can help us come together and heal one another. It pains me that it took someone's death for all of us to realize how important love and acceptance are. Fischer lived his life with so much genuine kindness for those he loved. We must do the same for our neighbor, our family member, for the stranger buying groceries in front of us. Intolerance only brings us anger, resentment, and deepens our insecurities. Acceptance brings us an inner peace and serenity that we can use to better express our love for all living beings. I am saddened that my brother accepted all for who they were but not all could accept him. He loved anyway. He was generous anyway. He was kind anyway.

Although he could not love himself, he did his best to extend his idea of love to as many people as he could. We must learn from this. The Buddha tells us “If you truly loved yourself, you could not hurt another.” By this way should we learn to forgive ourselves, find love for ourselves, cherish the compassion that we showed Fischer, and then extend those virtues to all. To quote, “Conquer the angry one by not getting angry; conquer the wicked by goodness; conquer the stingy by generosity, and the liar by speaking the truth.” Cherish your siblings. Cherish the LGBTQ youth of the world, and work to understand them, for true love comes from understanding. Cherish those whose mental health suffers. Depression is a disease, not a temporary mental state. Understanding that, and acting with that knowledge will help save more lives. We must keep these things in our mind, always. That is how I will honor my little brother. May Fischer find his peace in a life beyond this one, and may we find ours, here, with fond memories in our minds and his compassion in our hearts.