

PREFACE

"Our dreams are made of real things like a shoebox full of photographs."

Jack Johnson
American Musician

I wandered up to his room to sit and reminisce. We had kept Tony's room intact while he was away. Team pictures, blue ribbons, trophies, certificates, posters and multitudinous mementos covered the walls of his room. As I sat on his bed, I wondered how Leann and I might approach his room in the coming weeks; I mean, he would be gone from home for a long time. Of course, a single day seems a long time to be away from him. You know the feeling, right?

As I took it all in, I tried to remember when and where the pictures had been taken and his prized trophies won. I realized I didn't have clear memories of many of the photos or friends in the photographs. Time challenges our memory, surely; but it appeared from the evidence before me that much of his life had passed by without my taking notice. The human element of taking things for granted, I guess.

I approached his closet; it contained those things you might expect to find, arranged as only a teenage boy would care to have it. There were clothes on hangers.

Good job, Tony. There were clothes stuffed on shelves, the floor, and behind storage bins containing baseball cards and old toys that had long ago been retired. I reached into a box and grabbed one of the hundreds of match-box die-cast cars. I remembered, when he was just a little boy, how I would bring home a new car for him that I would purchase at the Ertl Toy Store in Dyersville, Iowa, or just about any toy store I could find when I was on the road selling musical instruments for our family music business. He would be waiting for me at the door when I arrived home and as I sat on the edge of his bed, I could visualize his beautiful little face, a smile from ear-to-ear, and his high-pitched voice.

And then, on the top shelf, all the way to the right side and below some caps and a baseball glove were the letters. Our letters.

The letters I had written to Tony were all placed neatly in a shoebox. It was a typical shoebox, I guess. It had a dark gray lid while the sides and bottom were a lighter gray, maybe like the gray you would see on a cool and crisp rainy day. Most of the letters were still in their original envelopes. I recognized some of the envelopes and I remember specifically writing on the outside of some of the them, something I did often, as if I had to

get one more word in before placing the letters in the mailbox.

Looking at my letters reminded me of how deeply sad I was while writing so many of them. I could feel the sadness return as I ran my fingers over each one, attentively looking for clues that might remind me of the day I wrote the letters and the sadness that was part of almost every day that Tony was away. Interspersed with the letters I had written to Tony were letters and cards he had received from others as well. I never knew, or perhaps I had just forgotten, that so many people had also been part of the journey with Tony. All in all, there were more than 225 cards or letters that came home with Tony and that were placed into the old shoebox.