



EULOGY FOR

Paige Elizabeth Mazurek

APRIL 4, 2015 - BY JUDGE JODI DEBBRECHT SWITALSKI



There she was. Standing before me. Innocent. Lost. A beautiful young woman.

There was so much that I knew about Paige without even yet knowing her.

You see, I didn't know Paige when she was born.

I can't tell you what she looked like, how much she weighed, or what her first word was.

I didn't know Paige as she grew up.... Did she like sports? Did she like pink... and ribbons and bows?

I suspect she did.

Did she do well in school or was she popular? Did she like to ride bikes?

The Paige I knew was the kind of girl that like to ride fast on her bike... down a hill in the summer sun. The rays of the sun kissing her cheeks and the wind blowing through her hair.

Free. In those moments, she was free.

But I really know none of these things.... But what I do know about Paige is that she possessed a light...

And a shade.

You see, I only just met Paige in _____

And as she stood before me, she was candid. Scared. Honest but very unsure of what the outcome was going to be. And as we spoke, she understood that I was on her team.... And the light, her light, the light that only Paige could possess, shown through.

What a smart, articulate, beauty stood before me – desperate and unsure – not knowing where life was headed but in that moment, clear of what she needed to do.

And by God, we were going to get into it together.

And by God, we were going to win. We were going to kick this addiction together.

But we didn't.

We didn't.

Forgive me, but I need everyone to really understand what happened.

Each year, 44,000 people die of a drug overdose. About 17,000 are from opioid medications and about 8,000 of those are from heroin.

I guess now it is 8000 and 1.

But who really is counting. No one is counting correctly and no one is keeping track of the names. It is almost impossible. So many! So often!

Drug overdoses have now exceeded motor vehicle and suicide deaths in our country. If you had asbestos in your child's school, would you raise hell to fix it? YES YOU WOULD!

Each year, only about 3000 people die from asbestos poisoning. And you saw the response to Ebola.... Fewer than 100 people even contracted Ebola in this country, let alone died.

Where is the outcry? Where is the response? How many of our beautiful children need to senselessly die before someone does SOMETHING!

(long pause)

Paige did not start that day thinking that she was going to die. She didn't start that day wanting to die! She – and about 8000 other young adults – didn't choose this! She was not ready....

By the time I met Paige, she was so far into it that she was diagnosed as "high risk." Despite all of our efforts, she was unable to stop using.... She had the best people working with her, the best support! We had long conversations, privately and in court. She had treatment.... Treatment with no recommendations upon release!! What is that?!

You see, society failed Paige! And Bryan.... And Susie... and Dickie.... And..... and AND!

But for me, Paige was my first.

(long pause)

In 2008, as a prosecuting attorney, I was assigned to a case where I had to prosecute 2 parents. I liked them – they were young, naïve, trying to make ends meet and going about it all the wrong way. I remember the first day I met Brendan.... It was at Children's Hospital when I walked into his room where he laid for 8-9 months, with only myself and his Guardian ad Litem visiting him. You see, he was the victim of an oxycontin overdose. His mother was addicted and he took the pills, just like he saw her take the pills. He was in full cardiac arrest in about 20 seconds.... He had to be resuscitated by EMS and only died after the judge ordered his life support removed. His parents pled guilty to manslaughter.

Brendan was the same age at the time as my son at the time.

18 months.

It was then that I knew that I had to do something. I repeatedly asked myself, often as I sat by his bedside, alone, crying, WHY?

WHY?

And what had I done to prevent this tragedy? How is it that this sweet blond haired and blue eyed boy deserved this?

DO SOMETHING, I said to myself – and that is just what I did.

Then, many years later, I met Paige.

I asked myself, again, how is it that this sweet, blond haired, bright eyed, innocent young woman deserved this? How did this happen?

WHY did this happen?

Only, this time, I knew that I had tried everything. Everything that I had in my arsenal of “tricks.” It still wasn’t enough....

Society’s lack of education, lack of funding, lack of accountability for this epidemic killed Paige.

That fact is of completely no consolation to me.... NONE WHAT SO EVER.

In the short year that I knew Paige, really knew Paige, we cried together, we talked together, we held each other accountable for what we knew might be the outcome....

Just like Brendan, she forever changed my life.

I wish I could say that it wasn’t that way. I wish to God that she was just another case, just another young girl whom I could guide to something better. Something safe.

As with many people, I hoped that Paige would be another individual that would come into my courtroom, unannounced, in long term recovery, and leading a successful, happy life.

(pause)

It was about 2 am on the 31st when I got the news about Paige. It had only been about 5 months since I last saw her.

I couldn’t get myself together. This one is personal.

My daughter, later that morning, saw me crying.... I told her about Paige. Grace asked to see a picture so I showed her one from Paige’s FB page.

The first thing that my 9, almost 10 year old remarked was how pretty Paige is.... Then she said, “Mom, she doesn’t look like someone that would use drugs.”

Understanding that my daughter is only 9, I couldn’t be upset with her. But isn’t this really the essence of the problem???? Isn’t it society’s lack of accountability for the problem that perpetuates the problem? Isn’t it a lack of resources and a lack of understanding that it is NOT SOMEONE ELSE’S KID?

Paige is another name in a long list of 8000 young people who die each year from this insidious epidemic that people in high places refuse to acknowledge and do anything about.

NOT ME!!

Paige, I will never forget you. I will live up to all of the promises that I made to you.... You will FOREVER be in my heart, in the hearts of everyone here today and in their prayers during this difficult time of loss. But perhaps even more importantly, you, my beautiful Paige, will be on my lips.

Your death will not be for nothing. YOU, MY BEAUTIFUL GIRL, WILL CHANGE LIVES.

YOU, BY YOUR DEATH, WILL GET DOCTORS TO PRESCRIBE DIFFERENTLY, GET PEOPLE TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR MEDS, GET COUNSELORS TO LISTEN, AND GET OPTIONS FOR THOSE WHO FEEL DESPERATE. And more.....

Everything, Paige, that you asked me to do but most importantly,

YOUR LIGHT WILL SHINE ON!

THE SHADE EXISTS FOR YOU NO MORE!!

I know you are listening now, Paige. And I want you to know that yes, your hair looked great when we all came to see you. I know how important that was to you.

Soak in the sun, our sweet Paige, let the wind blow in your beautiful hair and the sun kiss your cheeks. Be free and hurt no more.

We will handle it from here.

