

St. Xavier High School lost one of its own April 2 when senior Matt James died in an accident on a spring break trip to Florida. What follows are thoughts and memories from the Long Blue Line and beyond.

Peggy James wrote the following reflection the morning of Matt's funeral after what she called "that beautiful Friday night visitation with thousands of Matthew's friends and then going to sleep to the glow of a thousand luminaries outside my window." In it she talks about her son in relation to her favorite scripture reading, 1 Corinthians 13...

If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient. Although we seldom seemed to see this side of Matt, I was delighted with the stories from a couple underclassmen who shared of how he helped you patiently in the weight room.

Love is kind. So many of you said what a nice guy Matt was; he truly was. Whether just a smile, a hello in the hall, checking in on you to see how you are doing that day, or sitting beside you at the lunch table. Reflecting on this, he made it look so easy.

It is not jealous, love is not pompous, it is not inflated. Matt was a middle child, between two very different brothers with different gifts and talents. He loved them both, he admired them for their unique gifts.

It is not rude. Loud and competitive maybe, but Matt was always a polite young man.

It does not seek its own interests. Matt was an incredible athletic talent, but we know it was the team meant the most to Matt. He wanted to wait until after the football season to make his college decision. At our home, we never kept any outward football tribute to him and that was OK with him; he knew we were proud of his achievements.

It is not quick-tempered. He was a gentle giant. He had great self discipline. But we would often hear "gosh darn it" when thing didn't go his way.

It does not brood over injury. Can't say this; he wasn't perfect! But he did have a lot of fun on his "scooter" when his foot was in the cast.

It does not rejoice over wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Matt would have been a tremendous coach one day. He loved to encourage and congratulate when people achieved, always looking for the good, but also willing to critique.

It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Matt was given the gift of incredible strength. I think he felt he could carry the whole team, or even the weight of the world if needed.

Love never fails.

So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Matt truly loved us all, and will continue to love us forever. We thank God for the gift of Matthew.

Peggy James

Dear James family,

Our thoughts and prayers are with you during this difficult time. May God give you strength. May Matt's memory be eternal.

Fondly,

Anthony, Irene and Emanuel Zalants ('10)

I am a 1974 graduate of St. X. Our senior year, we lost Steve Huckins in November of 1973. He was 6-foot-4, 215 pounds, and gentle giant like Matt was. The year or two before that Paul Klein - also a football player - was killed in a car crash, hit by a grain truck in Preble County if my memory serves right. I pray for Matt's family. I know the pain they are going through. My niece was killed the day after Christmas 2006. I am a proud member of the Long Blue Line, and I really am saddened by this course of events. Why does it always have to be football players it seems? Such tragedy, such anguish. Thank goodness for the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus!

Marc J. Scanlon ('74)

Our prayers go to you. We live up here in northern Indiana and were really excited for you to see what true football is at Notre Dame. You will be in our hearts when the season kicks off in September, and we will treat the game you loved like you were on the football field at all times.

Lucy Bowers

Hello, to you all; and greetings in the name of Jesus,

My name is Timothy Swan. I was going through my e-mails this morning, when I discovered a sad story about a young man named Matt James who attended St. Xavier. Owing to the overwhelming amount of support and prayer during this most horrific of times, I know that faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ through the love of God the Father, will carry us through any and every ordeal.

Based upon the information that I have read, it is quite obvious that Matt James was appreciated and admired throughout the entire St. Xavier community, as well as to what would have been his extended family within Notre Dame.

It is very hard to comprehend this whole thing, especially on the heels of the loss of Phoebe Prince, the Irish-born teenager who took her own life after being the victim of consistent bullying. Believe me when I tell you that I know how it feels to lose friends under both types of circumstances.

But, the good news is that Matt is now in the kingdom of Heaven, experiencing total and complete joy, in the presence of the Lord. He will be celebrating Easter for all eternity.

My thoughts and prayers go out to the James family.

Take care and God bless you.

Yours in Christ,

Timothy Swan

I would like to give my condolences to Matt James' family. When I first heard of his death it was obviously devastating. He will be missed by everyone in the St. Xavier and Notre Dame communities. As a manager on the varsity football team, I got the opportunity to get to know Matt as a football player and as a brother. I will always look up to Matt as a great athlete and great brother of St. Xavier High School. May he always Rest in peace.

Matthew Martin ('12)

This is the second letter I have written for a fallen friend this year. It's not fair. Matt was so full of life. The first time I saw Matt was at freshman orientation. Matt, even then, was still a big guy, towering over most everyone. A guy like myself of a smaller stature had to tilt his head up to look at him. When I first witnessed him on the football field, it was obvious this guy was great. My friends and I would make jokes how he would destroy the opposing team. Somehow through this, we compared him to the Incredible Hulk. Man, that guy was invincible. But really, this is a contrast to what he was. Matt was a gentle giant who, like Kevin Le, had an unforgettable smile. It's hard to lose such a great guy. It's going to be a hard year, for all of us. I believe Matt will be watching us from heaven, guarding us, playing football in heaven. He's probably OT for JC. Matt, wherever you are, I love you, and get some sleep.

Joe Kenner ('10)

I never knew Matt James personally; I do regret having missed all the given chances to speak with him. I've always told myself, "maybe tomorrow I'll talk with him. He's not going anywhere." That tomorrow is no more. But when I saw a hundred men having the courage and strength to stand together, shoulder to shoulder, crying for a lost brother and friend, I knew no words of mine nor of anyone can prove truer the fact that he was loved, is loved, and will always be loved. The Lord has summoned his body, but his memories we keep.

Hung Nguyen ('10)

To the St. X Community,

My prayers are with you as you mourn the loss of Matt James.

Fr. Dan Gatti S.J. (Former President Xavier High School, New York, N.Y.)

I am so sorry for the loss of your son, your student, your friend, Matt.

Brian Sapp

To the James Family,

The mind cannot conceive of, nor do words exist to explain the type of grief you are experiencing. Please know that the entire St. Xavier community, as well as thousands not in that community, offer prayers and sympathies to you. Please know that even those who never knew Matt are experiencing this painful tragedy with you.

The Stephen Butler Family, Brian ('00)

Our thoughts and prayers go out to the entire St. Xavier High School community in your loss. Matt James will be remembered in our chapel for the next year at Masses and worship celebrated there.

Father Dave Zettel (Chaplain, Trinity High School, Louisville Ky.)

May the peace and grace of our Lord somehow be with the James family during this difficult time of tragic loss. I have entered Matt and his family into my daily prayer list, and I will continue to pray for the repose of his soul and peace for the James family.

Bob Coleman (Columbine Valley, Colorado)

We pray for Matt James and his entire family as well as the St. Xavier community. God bless you Matt.

Eric Ernst ('80) and family

I am so sorry to hear of the loss of this young man. I empathize so much for the family. I too have recently had a loss of a young adult; I can only offer my prayers and condolences. The Bible verse that gives me peace is "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10) May you be embraced and surrounded in God's love during this time.

Peace be with you and God bless

Danette Kappelman

Peggy, Jerry and family,

All of our thoughts and prayers have been with you since Friday night and we will continue to lift Matt and your family in prayer. Hold tight to your faith and allow our Blessed Mother to hold you in her arms and rest. All of us from Visitation are deeply sad and are here for support and will continue to pray.

All our love,

The Brossart Family Karen, John, John Jr. ('10), Katie, Mary and Jacob

I didn't know Matt James all that well, but he sat behind me last year in American History. I was always intimidated by his sheer size. Me being 5-foot-11 and 120 pounds and Matt being 6-foot-8 and 290 pounds, it was quite the contrast. Our teacher gave us both nicknames, too, since we were both named Matt. He was Little Matt and I was Big Matt. We're going to miss you Little Matt.

Matt Hare ('10)

Dear Mr. and Mrs. James,

Although I did not really know Matt, I will always remember his kind smile and friendly hellos when I would pass him in the halls. He always seemed so happy and enjoyed having friends around him. St. X is such a loving community, and when one of our own is taken from us it hurts even if we didn't know them personally. My thoughts and prayers are with you. I sincerely hope that all the wonderful memories of times with Matt will help you through his time of grief.

Rosemary Schuermann (Community Service Office)

I am a parent of a Louisville St. Xavier Alumnus. I just wanted to send my sympathy to the community and the family of Matt James. I cannot imagine the pain that the family - home and school - is going through. My thoughts and

prayers are with every one of you. I know that with the help of God and the support of the community you will all pull through this.

Again my prayers are with you all.

Diane Flatt

My husband and I want to express our deepest sympathy for your loss. Matt was an extraordinary person. We went to all the football, basketball and music programs at St. X, and appreciated his talent in all areas. He accomplished so much in his lifetime. Nothing we can say will take away the pain, but he will be remembered by so many people for a very long time. Your family will be in our thoughts and prayers during this very sad time.

Kathy and Tom Carroll (St. X grandparents)

My prayers are with you at this time of tragic loss of one of your own. We would have shared your pride in having Matt as one of our own very soon. May you find comfort in knowing people you will never meet are keeping all of you in prayer.

With consolation,

Dan Brennan (Notre Dame graduate in Boston, Massachusetts)

I can't imagine the pain that the family is feeling. I am deeply sorry for their loss. I am sure he was a fine young man who would have made his family and friends extremely proud; 17 is way too young. Again, my heart goes out to his parents and other family members and friends.

David A. DeBra

I am headmaster of Pope John Paul II Catholic High School in Nashville, Tennessee. Please know that our parents, teachers and students are praying for the James family and for the entire community of St. Xavier High School.

Faustin N. Weber (Headmaster, Pope John Paul II High School)

My thoughts and prayers go out to The James family through this difficult time. We will Remember Matt for his will and especially his heart. He will always and forever be remembered as a Golden Domer.

Rest in Peace Matt.

Mario Vazquez

To the parents of Matt James:

I wish to offer my sincere condolences to your family on the loss of your son. I never met Matt, and I have no direct connection to St. Xavier High School. I am, however, an alumnus of a Jesuit college (Spring Hill College, Mobile, AL; class of 1969), and, as such, I feel a bond with Matt and with your whole family. I will remember him and your family in my prayers.

I live in Panama City and Matt's tragic death has been in the news here quite a bit in the last few days. It might only be of small consolation to you at this time, but you should know that local police and government officials are seriously discussing ways to prevent what happened to Matt from happening to other spring breakers in the future.

As the father of grown daughters, and as a retired high school teacher, I know how difficult being the parent of a high school student can be. As parents you will have a tendency to blame yourself for what happened, and you might be plagued by guilt and remorse. Just know that every parent who has ever raised a child through adolescence knows and understands how you feel. But we also know and understand that we have to allow our children to grow up and take risks. *Every* kid tests the limits and does things that their parents wish they wouldn't do. As parents we have to put our faith in God's infinite mercy, and we have to trust that the hand of the Lord directs what happens. As a Catholic I pray for the repose of Matt's soul, but as a parent I pray for you.

Sincerely,

Ed Deluzain

Our family was fortunate to have two sons play football with Matt, Nevin Heard ('09) and Sam Castellini ('10). My most vivid memory of Matt comes to me now as I stand at the kitchen island in my home and look across to the door leading out to our patio and pool area. We hosted the senior class of 2010 football players for the traditional senior picnic the day before two-a-days began.

Toward the end of the afternoon as the sons of the parents helping with clean-up were being pressed into service, Peggy, myself and a couple mothers stood talking in that spot in my kitchen and in the door walked Matt - needing to duck to be sure he did not hit his head on the door. Peggy, the other moms and I all marveled and commented on how even with his physical stature, how gentle and wonderful a young man he was. He heard us talking about him and blushed like a young boy in a man's body. I stand in that spot now and see his smiling, gentle face in my doorway and I am thankful to have had him in our home. He was a good friend to all who knew him. He always thanked the mothers who served the team meals each week by name - that always made me smile.

Peggy and Jerry raised an exceptional young man. My heart is full of love and sorrow for them and their entire family. May God wrap His loving arms around them and all who knew and loved Matthew and hold them in this time of grief and mourning.

God Bless,

Shelley Castellini-Heard

Jerry, Peggy, Joann, Mark, and the entire James Family...

Please know of our deepest sympathy on the loss of Matt. He was a fine young man, and we know he will be dearly missed. You are all in our prayers, now and in the future. May God bless and be with all of you.

Nancy and Dick Klus

To Mr. and Mrs. James,

I had the pleasure and honor of playing football with your son in both 2007 and 2008; I can think of few greater individuals in this world than Matt. We ran in different circles, but I still considered him my friend, and I can only hope that he did as well. Matt had every reason to be stuck up and standoffish, but he never was. He was sweet, kind, and a true man for others. I remember having to line up against him in trench drills when the scout defense was short on big men. He never attempted to seem like he had to embarrass me or make me feel like a fool. He could have easily knocked me down, yet he never did. That was the kind of person Matt was; he had the ability to bring people down, but that thought would never cross his mind. The world is a darker place without him, and I miss him. The only consolation in this time is that God now has the best left tackle in the world to protect his blindside.

Respectfully,

Aaron Lingler ('09)

Dear James Family,

You all have been on the surface of our thoughts and prayers since Friday. Our sons, Aaron ('09) and Nathan ('13) are "Xavier men forever" with Matt. Please know the entire St. X family grieves with you. God bless all our boys.

David, Julie, Aaron and Nathan Lingler

I am blessed to know the James family. I did not know Matt, personally. I could spot him down a hall, everyone could. I often said to his Uncle Mark, "What did Jerry and Peggy mix in that baby's formula, Miracle Grow?" I know I never saw him without a smile. Every sporting event I can think of Grandma Joanne was in the stands, out-cheering the student section, and his Uncle Mark always beamed with pride when he was mentioned. As families go, there just aren't many closer or more loving. I can't imagine the loss his family feels, his parents, his brothers, his aunts and uncles, his wonderfully sweet, gracious and kind grandmother. How does someone console their child, while mourning the loss of a grandchild? At first, much like when Kevin Le passed, I thought, "How do you deal with such loss?" But watching the community come together, hold each other, and prepare to hold anyone's whose knees may weaken so the Long Blue Line continues to stay strong, I realized that if I can think of 50 Matt James smiles, his family must think of 50 million. And each one is a blessing, a shining memory that will not be forgotten by them. It's

not about a football player who signed with Notre Dame. It's about a little boy, who was part of a family, who was part of his school, who was part of a community, none of whom will ever forget him.

Anonymous

To the James Family and the St. Xavier Family,

I extend my condolences to you in this most difficult time. I am presently a sophomore at Notre Dame, and I have to be honest up front; I never knew Matt, I don't know your family, and I'm not affiliated with St. Xavier in any way. What I do know from what I've read is that Matt was very excited to come here and join the Notre Dame Family. I remember when I first visited Notre Dame during my college search not so long ago, it was that phrase - the Notre Dame Family - that attracted me and got me to commit after only that first visit. Matt unfortunately will not be able to physically become a member of our Family in the fall, but I will tell you now that he already is and forever will be a member of our Notre Dame Family in spirit. Not only that, but his Families - the James Family by blood, and the St. Xavier Family by brotherhood - are also a part our Notre Dame Families too, now and forever. We are praying for you all, that you may receive the strength to carry each other on through these hard times and honor Matt, and we will sincerely miss the opportunity to call Matt a friend, classmate, and teammate.

God bless you all,

Phillip Sitter

Please express my family's deepest condolences to the James family in this most difficult time. My son is a St Xavier High School (Louisville) junior and played against your very talented son this past fall. No words can express the sadness that is felt for the loss of your son. The Louisville St. Xavier community prays for your son and your family.

Todd Anderson

My memories of Matt were of him coming in on Tuesday and Thursday mornings in the Ellis Gym lobby where I work at the information desk. He would always stop to ask me how I was doing, and that just touched me so much. He was such a nice kid, and I will miss him very much. I will never forget you, Matt.

Mrs. Rosie Bernard

I've been discussing with my parents how I've felt, and now have a few things I need to put out there about the Matt James I knew.

I had the honor and privilege to play football with Matt my freshman year. During the middle of the season I was becoming overwhelmed with schoolwork and practice. I wanted to quit. I remember looking up at Matt on the sideline - not that he was on the sideline that often - and telling him, "I'm done." . He looked at me and asked why. I didn't have a real answer. He told me to stick with it. I did so, and I had the time of my life the rest of the season. Because of his simple question and recommendation, I was able to stick it out and say I played football at St. X.

I also had American Dream class with him first semester this year. He did a film project on the movie "Rudy" and passed around a binder full of his scholarship offers. I looked at it and became awe struck at how many colleges wanted him. After class I asked him how it felt to be doing something he loved and being able to attend any college he wanted because of it. He asked me if I wanted to be a Marine Officer in ROTC and I said, "Yes, of course." He replied, "Well, they pay for your college, right?" "Yes." "Well, you know how it feels to do something you love."

That really stuck with me. Watching him on the football field was one thing, but the Matt James in the classroom and the Matt James I knew as a friend was something completely different. He affected everyone around him. Our school has lost one of its brightest stars. Matt's personality has touched us all and I know for a fact he'd want us to remember him as he was and be able to finish out the year. Matt was an amazing person and I'll always remember his big gentle smile and the way we'd always joke around about having the same name. He was a great classmate, great teammate, a fantastic friend. But most importantly he was an amazing person. Rest in peace Matt. We love you.

Matt Curnutte '10

I never knew Matt, only to watch him play a St. Xavier football game and to watch him play against LaSalle at a basketball game or two. I watched him play with great admiration. He truly loved being a part of the team. As a mother of a St. X graduate, (Ryan Moeller, '08) , our family would like to express our sorrow and heartfelt sympathy for the family, friends and community of St. Xavier High School. Matthew will truly be missed. May he rest in peace and look over us with a team of angels. We are all be better people for having the privilege of knowing him for his hard work, dedication and acts of kindness. God bless you and give you strength.

Karen Moeller Bollin, Ryan Moeller ('08), Taryn Moeller

I never met Matt... don't know his family... but I did see him play once at Highlands. He was an incredible talent. In fact, my family could overhear Matt on the sidelines cheering on his team during the game. My son Spencer was especially surprised that Matt wasn't yelling at his teammates when they were losing, instead he was motivating them and cheering them on. I have been thinking of Matt's family since I heard the news and wanted to say that I am deeply sorry for your loss. What a terrible tragedy and terrible accident. It could have happened to anyone and I am so sorry it happened to your son.

He will be remembered for his talent and by my son (who is 8) as that "really big guy who was cheering on his teammates even when they were losing" during the Highlands game. You should be proud of the impression he made. It was a positive impression and something that was done on the sidelines, not on the field. Something that quite simply showed that your son had character as well as athletic ability.

My prayers are with you and your family. God Bless,

Tricia Macke (Fox 19 Anchor)

The creators of the Matt James tribute page on Facebook invite you to view this short [video clip](#).