

Jamie B. Werner: August 3, 1989 – February 9, 2017

A Grandmother's Recollections (August, 2017)

My first thought on meeting Jamie was, "He looks just the way Rick looked when he was a newborn." Jamie was about two weeks old when, as Rick and I exited Logan Airport and approached the car, I saw him sitting in his car seat, with Debbie eyeing him protectively from the front seat. It was thrilling for me to meet my first grandchild and to watch his interaction with his parents.

One of my special memories of that first visit was quieting Jamie when he cried without the obvious causes of hunger or a wet diaper. I took him upstairs and rocked him back to sleep, whispering soothing thoughts to him. It seemed like a good beginning to a precious relationship.

Another early memory occurred when Pat and Red Cross took all of us out for dinner at a lovely restaurant near a waterfall. They took all of us – Jamie's baby seat was in a chair next to the table, and he was either sleeping or quiet most of the time. His exposure to good food started early.

There were other visits to the Union Street townhouse that were heartwarming. While Jamie was napping, Debbie and I often chatted over coffee in their roomy kitchen. When he was big enough for a stroller, I took him for walks in the neighborhood. One time we visited a firehouse where he was both fascinated and a little frightened. Those shiny trucks were like magnets, but they were awfully big!

On a later visit to Union Street, after the birth of Morgan, I recall Jamie being very excited about going off to a dinosaur exhibit. Leaving his new baby sister to view ancient reptiles was a real outing.

Interspersed with my visits to the Boston townhouse were their visits to me at the house on Oliver Street in D.C. One of the most touching tributes I've ever had came after a game of hide-and-seek. I had hidden in the large closet off the master bedroom and when Jamie found me, he crawled in beside me. As we sat there he said, "I guess you are my best friend." Fast forward some twenty-five years to contemplate the hundreds of friends who attended the memorial after his death!

The pool at the Oliver Street house played an important role in my life with the Werner family. On visits when Jamie was young, while he was napping upstairs with a monitor

nearby, Debbie, Rick and I were often outside on the patio, talking and listening carefully both to the monitor and for any sounds coming directly through the open windows.

We talked about his positive preschool experiences and later Jamie proudly showed me his folder labeled "My Project."

Once, before he was old enough to be turned loose in the pool, I recall setting up an old playpen in the yard near the pool, so Jamie could watch his parents and some friends play water polo. Later, he took to being in the water like a fish, with no fear of getting his head under water and soon he was going for total immersion. I don't recall his going off the diving board but he did practically all the tricks you can think of aside from that. I can clearly recall this bundle of energy, wearing his blue safety wings, dashing down the edge of the pool, ready to jump in all over again.

With his summer birthday it was logical to have a couple of his birthday parties by the pool. Everyone seemed to have fun and there are many pictures of Jamie eating cake and ice cream. It's a wonder his blond curls weren't covered with ice cream.

A year or so later there was another type of celebration. Dave and I were married in October of 1994. Jamie was five and had recently been to Kevin and Terry's wedding so he felt weddings were quite normal. After the marriage service at St. Alban's Church, the Rector asked Jamie if he would like to ring the bell in the church tower. He pulled the rope that rang the bell with great enthusiasm; Morgan didn't want to participate as she was coming down with flu and was not up to par.

The wedding reception at the Cosmos Club had a couple of enjoyable moments for him. The weather was ideal and we were outside in a garden with a fish pond. Tracking the goldfish was fun and no one fell in the pond. Later, Francesca Richardson brought out a bag of face masks for everyone to choose one to wear for a goofy picture. Jamie didn't select one but he got some laughs out of watching the adults look silly.

Some three or four years later I have a heartwarming recollection of seeing a movie with Jamie and Morgan. It was the movie "Babe," about the pig that could talk and was trained to herd sheep. Jamie commented at the end, "That was the best movie I ever saw!" Dave and I thought it was pretty good, too.

In that general period of time we often took all three children out to eat at Clyde's in Chevy Chase, because waiting for the model train to circle the perimeter of the ceiling was fun for all of us. I don't remember what Stephen had to eat but Jamie and Morgan had wide food interests and ordered many things from the menu. Their eyes were bigger than their appetites, of course, resulting in our walking away from a table of

half-eaten food that could have fed a family of four. Jamie's idea of having ample amounts of food at a meal began early.

In the spring of 1999 Debbie and Rick planned a weekend away and we arranged to have the kids stay in our guest room at The Towers condo. The reason the date is clear to me is because Dave was away on a trip to represent Merrill's Marauders at a museum in China at that time. We had a great time: swimming in the pool, sliding down a grassy hillside next to the pool (them, not me), and playing games such as "Mad Libs." When it was time for bed, Jamie would not let me open a window on a mild night because he thought his mother would be afraid one of them would fall out. The window remained closed.

At other times when parents were away I stayed with them at Burdette Road. I remember taking Jamie to Maplewood football games and other activities. If GPS had been available then, we would have arrived more promptly – neither of us was a good navigator.

One instance of Jamie's thoughtfulness that remains vivid for me occurred after his Confirmation at St. Bart's. I was interested in using a bathroom and Jamie insisted on escorting me downstairs and delivering me to the door.

Dave once suggested that the Werner family watch a documentary about Merrill's Marauders. Jamie's attention to detail shone forth: he asked why there were palm trees on an area that was supposed to have been raked by gunfire. Dave was very impressed at his observation, checked with the filmmakers and discovered the palm trees had been superimposed on the original film.

Football became an all-engrossing interest. It was exciting when he quickly moved from the JV team at Whitman to the Varsity Team. Once when I was standing near the entrance to the stadium watching the team file by before the game, he spotted me and broke ranks to come over and give me a hug. Was I proud! At his age I would never have had the confidence to do such a thing.

Over the years we had several one-on-one lunches in Bethesda. He helped me to have some familiarity with happenings in the lives of young adults and began to show his interest in politics and history, as well as food. It was at one of these lunches when he was home from college that I floated the concept of coaching high school football and financing it by teaching history. His great grandfather, Arthur Werner, did that at Kingswood School in West Hartford for many years.

Jamie referred to that conversation years later at dinner at the Werners on the occasion of my 80th birthday. [*From JBW email 7/8/12* : Thank you again for continuously sharing your

wisdom with me, and especially during that lunch in Bethesda so many years ago. I am so thankful for your involvement in my life over the years, you have always been a wonderful role model.] I was touched that he recalled it (and was overwhelmed also by Stephen's comments on my playfulness with Halo and Morgan's singing "I Am Woman, Hear Me Roar.")

Cooking was becoming such an important facet of his life that Jamie thought seriously of opening a restaurant one day. When I emailed him my appreciation of the Fish Taco dinner he cooked for another birthday celebration, he replied with a lengthy explanation of how he did it. He couldn't give a specific recipe because his cooking was a mixture of inspiration of the moment and generosity of seasonings, but he did give me a lengthy explanation of elephant garlic.

The last time I saw Jamie was at a Sunday lunch at my apartment. He had been working late the night before and was not feeling well, but because he made a huge effort, we had a good time. He told me how much he liked working with special needs kids and that he had done a data analysis of incidents where poor behavior had disrupted the class. It turned out that only 6% of the kids were responsible for this behavior but the school administrators were not interested in his findings.

Somehow our talk turned to the Civil War and I showed him a framed copy of a drawing of a Union ship battling a Confederate ship. I had identified the ships incorrectly all these years but he spotted a small flag flying on one ship that proved the opposite of what I had thought. We were both pleased at his discovery. I had planned to give him the Time-Life series of the History of the Civil War when he had room for the multi-volume set. Our lunch that January Sunday is a treasured memory.

Perhaps nothing shows Jamie's great enthusiasm and generosity of spirit better than his own words.

Excerpts from two of his emails to me:

[9/9/2012 In response to an article I sent him about breeding dogs to be sled dogs.]

I had no idea there was so much science and change involved in dog sledding. I had a mental image of dog sledding being very traditional and inflexible. That is extremely interesting, thank you so much for thinking of me. I am often curious as to Jakarious' genetic origin, as he doesn't often fit behavioral descriptions of huskies or malamutes. I am really impressed by the far reaching boundaries of your curiosity and I really appreciate you sharing this knowledge with me!

[7/20/2014 In response to my thanks for a dinner he cooked.]

I am so flattered by your compliments, nothing makes me happier than when someone enjoys my cooking, and I know Lauren feels similarly. I love that we all celebrate your birthday together every year, it is always so much fun and so nice to have everyone gathered for such an important and special occasion. I really wanted to make a special meal that was a new experience for you and it makes me so happy to hear that I succeeded in doing so! I really admire that you continue to be so adventurous and curious in your culinary tastes. Every year as I note that so many other people become grumpy or shut themselves off to new experiences as they grow older, I become prouder and prouder of you and how you continue to be so open minded and continue to embrace new experiences! I could not possibly ask for a greater role model.

I am so happy that you had an enjoyable birthday and that I was able to contribute to that. I feel so blessed to be part of a family like ours, in which so many different people bring so many different but valid viewpoints to the table. It often seems to me like there is never a dull moment at our family gatherings, and I have always attributed much of this to the way you have always encouraged all of us to read and engage our literary curiosities. Anyways, I wanted you to know how much I love you and look up to you, and how much it means to me that you choose to spend your birthday with me!

Love always,
Jamie

