

Thank you for being here today to celebrate the life of Michael.

I do not believe it is an exaggeration to say that in his seven years, he touched more people in more ways than most of us will in 70.

I humbly thank God for the honor of being his dad.

He inspired me - us - to be better.

He showed us what courage really is.

He left us with a lifetime of memories.

And endless lessons about how to find joy in the good times and rebound from the bad times.

He packed a lot into his seven years.

He was elected president of his kindergarten class.

He graduated on time from that extraordinary school – Meadowbrook.

He had a key role in his school play, following in both of his brothers' footsteps.

He was the leading rebounder on his Meadowbrook Mavericks basketball team.

He was an honorary member of the North Texas Homeland Security Team.

He was photographed with the Dallas Mavericks Championship trophy and quickly bonded with one of their dancers. 😊

He threw, along with his mom, and along with what I came to know as the Team Michael Moms, some of the best block parties in the history of University Park.

He knew how to handle the media better than most.

He flew the real space shuttle trainer and successfully landed it from space three times.

His photo flew in the command module of the International Space Station.

He attended batting practice with the Texas Rangers and decided then and there that he would play professional baseball.

Just three months ago he ran (and walked) and finished a 5K, raising over \$12,000 for neuroblastoma research. Those who were in attendance can testify that yours truly trailed him the whole race.

He completed 15 Beads of Courage necklaces. That's over 1,500 beads, every bead representing just one difficult and sometimes tortuous step in his treatment.

No one here can imagine how hard that was. What that took. His body may have failed him. But his spirit never quit.

So many of you took this journey with us from the very first day he was diagnosed. Many more joined along the way. All of you helped make that journey more bearable, more comforting.

We will be eternally grateful for your kindness, your generosity and your unfailing support.

I want to give special thanks to a group of boys who were asked by circumstances not of their choosing, to face something far too difficult, far too early in their young lives.

So thank you to Joseph, Ben, Graham, Dylan, Santana, Shantiv, Henry, Baker, Dhilan, GB, Beck, Caden, Judah, John and Brendan.

For being Michael's friend. For welcoming him back, time after time, from multiple rounds of chemo, from surgeries, from procedure after procedure and giving him a place – a destination – where he

could escape for a time, feel safe for a time. You were wonderful beyond words.

I would tell this audience to watch these boys. God put them around Michael for a reason. They are a special group, imbued with character, integrity and kindness far beyond their years. I'd like to think he has a plan for them, that they will go on and do great things. It is my special prayer that they will be watched over, nurtured, and live long and happy lives.

Alison and I hope to be a part of their important lives for a long time to come.

No parent should ever have to stand here. But too many do. One is too many, I think. A prayer then, to all the families we have met who know this day, and those who through no fault of their own will need the same extraordinary kind of community and spirit we have found in all of you.

A prayer, too, for Michael's doctors, nurses and caregivers. God's hand is surely there as well. They are the very best among us. Wading in day after day with hope and determination and skill, against terrible odds. None of them surrendered either. And for that, future Michaels will benefit.

There is a quote from John Wesley, about the nature of good:

Do all the good you can  
By all the means you can  
In all the ways you can  
In all the places you can  
At all the times you can  
To all the people you can  
As long as you ever can

I think Michael felt that from all of you. I think you felt that from Michael.

The greatest gift that God can bestow on any of us is the gift of parenthood. It humbles you. Brings meaning. Bestows upon us the kind of joy and love that is forever and irreplaceable.

A friend of mine wrote me a few weeks back and said, “You will cry for a time, but in time you will smile whenever you think of Michael. He was that kind of child. One of a kind.”

So a few things I will always think of when I think of Michael. The things that I know will make me smile.

Those of you who know us best, know we are a mixed marriage. A Democrat and a Republican living under the same roof. Last Christmas, we were watching “It’s a Wonderful Life.” Michael was intrigued with the story. Perhaps its depiction of heaven and angels played a part. But he really started paying attention when Mr. Potter appeared on the screen, ranting on about the people of the town who didn’t deserve credit. Michael asked his mom to hit the pause button. And then without hesitation Michael blurted out, “So I guess Mr. Potter is a Republican.” We can argue whether or not that was Capra’s intent, but Alison was delighted.

Michael was obsessed with the TV Show “The Biggest Loser.” Every Tuesday, the family would gather in the master bedroom to watch the latest episode. He would pick out a favorite contestant. He had an uncanny ability to see who the finalists would be long before his parents. Maybe he recognized kindred spirits – people who were very sick who worked so hard to get well. His “wish” from the Make a Wish Foundation was to go to The Biggest Loser Ranch and work out with the trainers. We almost made it. That show carried him through some very tough times. As many of you know, Bob Harper, the lead trainer on the show, called Michael last week.

He invented a mythical, invisible character named “Arthur,” like Harvey the rabbit, who he claimed was 400 pounds, inhaled whatever food was in the house, and was responsible for all of the digestive noises and smells in the house – thus taking he and his sister off the hook. Arthur even traveled in the minivan and airplanes. He was never spotted by the TSA.

Michael and I engaged in hundreds of online games. He was a big fan of “Words with Friends” and “Scramble.” Some of you out there were his repeated victims. I lost far more than I won. In fact, “Scramble” became an embarrassment for me; he routinely beat me by five to six hundred points. A thoroughly humbling experience for someone who allegedly makes his living manipulating words.

Not very long after he was diagnosed, out of the blue, he drew a rainbow. The rainbow you see here. Because he was Michael, he was dissatisfied with his first few efforts, and worked until he felt like he got it right. I have never been prone to the mystical or to signs, but not anymore. More evidence, at least for us, of a greater power guiding a child’s hand. I will carry that rainbow with me for the rest of my days.

Michael and his mother had a special bond – the bond between a mother and son. Its intensity grew over the months and years of Michael’s struggle. They even invented a special grammar, an insider’s language. I think the loudest I laughed over the past three years was listening to their back and forth.

Michael’s favorite pillow was called nini. Alison has a matching one, too. It had special powers to comfort, and went with Michael every time he spent the night at the hospital. No one dare came between them and their nini pillows.

“Hoddie-Ho” was a catch-all phrase. Like that’s so “Hoddie Ho.” It could mean “Oh my gosh, it’s great to be back in my bed after another long stay in the hospital.” Or when he was watching something on TV, it could mean “What the heck was that?” Or Emory would do something, and it would become an exclamation of incredulity: “Hoddie-Ho!”

They had a peculiar unit of measurement called a “fee.” Which was loosely based on infinity – but meant more than infinity. Its origin was Alison and Michael trying to explain how much they loved each other. Don’t know how Stephen Hawking would feel about “fee.”

One of my favorite routines was when they were apart, their re-affirmation when they got back together.

Michael would say:

I miss you so much.

Alison would say back:

I miss you so much.

Michael would then say:

I love you so much.

And Alison would say:

I love you so much.

So Michael, today, here, I say to you, on behalf of all of us gathered here:

We will miss you so much.

And we love you so much.