

## **Eulogy for Devin, my dear, loving brother**

The name Devin is of Irish origin and means bard or poet. It is fitting that my parents named Devin “poet” instead of other alternatives, such as Forrest or Rome, for Devin lived a life of great poetry. His life was a work of art.

The last hike we went on together was at Rock Creek. He picked me a wild rose and we sat by the creek. He showed me the trout hugging up close to the bank, and as we drank water he picked me wild mint and found a mayfly on a tall, green stalk of grass. He let the fly inch onto his finger and watched it for a while with those big, blue eyes of his. He told me that now was the time to fish when the mayflies were out. We saw mountain goats, babies at that, and when they startled at our presence he said, “We should leave and let them be.” He showed me with such performative grace how to freeze if you see a grizzly bear, and then we laughed as he demonstrated what to do when you see a mountain lion—move and act as big as you can to scare them away.

This was my brother—funny, kind, empathetic, a naturalist, a playful spirit in this beautiful world. He breathed with such strength all this beauty in its splendor and sorrow into his paintings. He was a poet of color and light.

I love my brother like I love my breath. He knows me better than I know myself, and sometimes he loved me more than I was able to love myself. Devin’s love for this world was greater than his pain. If you ever had the pleasure of spending time with him, you felt this immediately. Devin loved in so many beautiful ways so many beautiful people. My love for him as a sister is but one drop in the ever-expansive river that is Devin.

As much as I want him back in a body so we can enjoy food together again, hike in nature together again and laugh and dance together again, I trust his spirit was meant to move on to a more spacious, light-filled, loving place. He was not mine. He was not ours. He is everything, and now that he lives in spirit he is everywhere.

And just as it is not ours to cling to his body, it is not ours to judge his choice to leave the world of human form for a more subtle, sensitive, radiant and ever-accepting realm. There is no shame around the very personal, private path to leave this world and the ones you love, for all paths lead to the same beautiful place. In the starburst that was Devin’s choice are many messages. He is asking us to empathize with the pain of this world in the ways he finally could not. He is asking us to love the unlovable in this world in the ways he finally could not. And he is asking us to remember, by virtue of remembering him and the gifts he gave us, our memories in the fiercest of ways, for as he said to me, “Proust believed that all you have is your memories, and it is true.”

Sentimental, yes, but Devin was sentimental. As a man and an artist he created a tender sphere of tremendous creative force, dignity, and wisdom around him. He manifested true self-will and discipline, knowing the responsibility an artist bears and the value of a wholesome life to balance the rigor an art career demands. Beyond being my brother, or my father’s son, or Annie’s partner, he was an artist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Artists are healers. They evoke and capture not some distant

more serene and compelling future, but our most prescient present moment. They reveal the way things are, not how we might imagine them to be. They ask us to see.

There is an urgency in this, akin to the urgency in Devin before he passed. For you see, if I haven't yet made it clear, Devin's spirit loves this world. His spirit loves this place called Montana. His spirit loves us. His love, in some ways, is so pure it could no longer remain contained in a singular man. He wanted to return to the source to cleanse his spirit, to know itself again and soon return to us in another form.

Perhaps we are to know Devin for the rest of our lives through his artwork. Like all great artists, he lives in his paintings. And perhaps in all those fine strokes there is a secret for each one of us, a meditation or a mantra for us to take with us as we walk through this world. Perhaps the mystery and the unknowable is Devin's gift to us, whispering to us to slow down, love, see and listen. Perhaps his play of such austere light and deep darkness in his paintings is a call for us to contemplate and get comfortable with knowing both pain and pleasure, sorrow and joy, beauty and terror, death and rebirth.

I want to end by sharing a passage with you from Pema Choden as a way of offering how we might continue to be moved by Devin in spirit. I offer this in the hopes that each one of us who was touched by Devin's life and death walk with a more noble heart now. For Devin was noble. To know him as spirit, now, we can step into our own very personal, well-worn pair of noble shoes and be the soft spot of the awakened heart. Loving him as spirit can mean that he is loving you into infinity. And that, my friends, brings me great joy and peace.

“*Bodhicitta* is a Sanskrit word that means “noble or awakened heart. It is said to be present in all beings. Just as butter is inherent in milk and oil is inherent in a sesame seed, this soft spot is inherent in you and me.

It is said that in difficult times, it is only bodhicitta that heals. When inspiration has become hidden, when we feel ready to give up, this is the time when healing can be found in the tenderness of pain itself. This is the time to touch the genuine heart of bodhicitta. In the midst of loneliness, in the midst of fear, in the middle of feeling misunderstood and rejected is the heartbeat of all things, the genuine heart of sadness.

Just as a jewel that has been buried in the earth for a million years is not discolored or harmed, in the same way this noble heart is not affected by all of our kicking and screaming. The jewel can be brought out into the light at any time, and it will glow as brilliantly as if nothing had ever happened. No matter how committed we are to unkindness, selfishness, or greed, the genuine heart of bodhicitta cannot be lost. It is here in all that lives, never marred and completely whole.”

—Colleen Leonardi, Devin's sister, August 1, 2014