

To Tucker Elementary, Teachers, Coaches, and the School Community

Read online with photographs and supporting records

To Tucker Elementary School, Bella's teachers, coaches, and school community,

Thank you for being part of Bella's life.

Thank you for the care, encouragement, patience, and time you gave her as she learned, played, grew, and discovered more about herself and the world around her.

Thank you for knowing Bella in places where I could not always be beside her.

You knew the Bella who walked into a classroom, sat beside her friends, learned something new, raised her hand, worked through something difficult, played on a team, tried an instrument, laughed at something silly, or simply had an ordinary school day.

Those ordinary days mean more to me now than I could ever adequately explain.

As her father, I knew one Bella. At school, on the court, on the field, with her friends, and with the adults who taught and encouraged her, there were other little pieces of her life unfolding every day.

Some of those moments I saw. Many of them I did not.

And now, those memories are precious to me.

When you remember Bella, I hope you remember more than how her life ended.

Remember the student.

Remember the teammate.

Remember the friend.

Remember her smile, her personality, her curiosity, her laughter, and the ordinary little moments that made her Bella.

Most of all, remember the little girl who was still discovering what she loved and who she wanted to become.

A teacher may remember something Bella said that I never heard.

A coach may remember the way she responded to encouragement, something she did at practice, or a moment when she surprised herself.

A classmate may remember a joke, a conversation, something funny she did, or simply what it felt like to sit beside her.

Someone may remember a moment that seemed completely ordinary at the time but has become extraordinarily important now.

You carry memories of Bella that I may never have had the chance to know.

Sharing those memories gives me something precious: another glimpse into my daughter's life—a moment I was not there to see, but one that was still part of her ten years in this world.

There is also something difficult that I do not want to leave unsaid.

Over the years, I attended Bella's games, watched her play, met some of her teachers and coaches, spoke with other parents, and was present for many of the school and sports activities that became part of her childhood. Some of you knew me not simply as Bella's father in name, but as the father who showed up for her.

After Bella died, however, I do not remember hearing personally from many of the teachers, coaches, or school leaders who had been part of her life.

I want to offer a special thank-you to Marcelle Moukarzel, Bella's fifth-grade French teacher. She was the only person from the school who reached out to me personally to offer condolences. In the midst of losing my daughter, that kindness meant more than I can put into words.

Ms. Moukarzel, thank you for remembering Bella and for making room for her father's grief. You did not need to have answers or know exactly what to say. You reached out with compassion, and you helped me feel less alone. I will always be grateful for that simple, deeply meaningful kindness. Your care for Bella, and the humanity you showed me after her death, are things I will not forget.

I understand that her death happened under painful and complicated circumstances. I understand that people may not have known what to say or may have been uncertain about reaching out.

But no one needed to know exactly what happened to Bella to acknowledge that a father had lost his ten-year-old daughter.

No one needed to take sides.

No one needed to investigate anything, defend me, or agree with me.

Sometimes compassion requires only a few words:

"I'm sorry about Bella."

That would have been enough.

I say this not to take away from my gratitude for what you gave Bella while she was alive. I remain thankful for every teacher who taught her, every coach who encouraged her, and every person who contributed something positive to her childhood.

But gratitude and hurt can exist together.

The silence hurt.

And even with that hurt, I still hope that the people who knew Bella will remember her, speak about her, and share the pieces of her life that they were fortunate enough to witness.

There is another reason those memories matter so much to me.

Bella was only ten. There was still so much of her life ahead of her. She was still discovering her talents, her interests, her friendships, and the person she might someday become.

As her father, I expected to have years to watch those things unfold.

I expected more school years, more games, more accomplishments, more ordinary afternoons, more stories about something that happened in class, and more moments when she would come home excited to tell me something new.

We did not get those years.

What we have now are the ten beautiful years Bella shared with us and the memories carried by the people who knew her during them.

That is why even the smallest memory matters to me.

Every story adds another piece to the picture of who Bella was.

And when those stories are shared, a part of her childhood that might otherwise disappear is preserved.

If you have a photograph, classroom memory, team memory, funny story, drawing, school project, or even a few sentences about Bella, I hope you will consider sharing it through this website.

Nothing is too small.

Sometimes the smallest memories are the ones that bring someone back to us most clearly—the sound of their laugh, something they always said, the way they reacted to something funny, or an ordinary moment no one realized would one day become precious.

Thank you to every teacher who taught her.

Thank you to every coach who encouraged her.

Thank you to the classmates and friends who laughed, learned, practiced, played, and grew alongside her.

And thank you to the Tucker Elementary community for giving Bella a place where part of her childhood unfolded.

You were part of her story.

And because you were part of her story, you are also part of the memories that remain.

Thank you for being part of those ten years.

Thank you for remembering my Bella.

With gratitude,

Dukens Pierre-Louis
Bella's father ("Babe")