

Thomas Sydney Dooley (24) in the words of his oldest sister Catherine Cashio (06 Feb 2017)

As I was getting ready this morning it felt almost as though Thomas were still here. I could picture him in the bathroom below dressing to the nines in his full suit and adjusting his tie and pocket square. If he had been with us getting ready, I know when he was dressed he would have come upstairs, slouched with his hunched back, and thrown his arms over Jenna and I. Many of you probably know this pose, he even used it occasionally on friends we brought to the house that he was meeting for the first time. "Well, I sure have two beautiful sisters. Do you know how beautiful you both are?"

And it wasn't just us, I think Thomas shared a special gentleness with many of the women he knew and cared for. Whether it was an arm around you, a complement, flowers, or a smile he would make you feel special, because he truly believes you are.

Thomas had no fear. Around the same time diving boards, Thomas took a liking to climbing up on the coffee table. Well at a year and a half Thomas wasn't old enough yet to be able to actually jump, but he would try and inevitably just step right off falling flat on his face. And then he'd get up and climb right back. He also enjoyed other extreme events like surfing, longboarding, and riding four wheelers even after he busted himself pretty badly at Dale's. I don't think he felt pain the same way that most people do.

Thomas also could be pretty chill. He spent a lot of time gaming in his room or with friends. He enjoyed just hanging out, or sitting quietly around a fire. He liked simply watching American Pickers or the Simpsons. Other times he was more outgoing, and enjoyed beach trips, lake trips, festivals, and cooking big meals for others. (I think he might have been a pure carnivore if it weren't for mashed potatoes.)

Like many a young child I wanted another little sibling and was ecstatic when I found out there was another on the way. Thomas was due to arrive on my eighth birthday, December 12th. My mother however recalls my indignant insistence that he not be born then; I apparently had no intention of sharing my birthday. She was induced, and he was born on the 11th. I remember holding his soft little body for the first time in the hospital. I remember the intrigue of his little body glowing at home from the fluorescent light fixing his jaundice. We moved to Alabama, we both grew, and when Thomas was 14 I moved away from Alabama. The past ten years I've lived in FL, OH, and NJ - always in the Eastern Time zone. So each year the last hour of Thomas's birthday was also the first hour of mine. We would call each other or text during this time to celebrate, and even still it will continue to be one of the best hours of each year.

For that reason Thomas often called me birthday sister. He also called me little sister, because though he is much younger he quickly surpassed me in height. But his most common greeting was "hey sister."

We loved watching and re-watching episodes of the dysfunctional Bluth family in Arrested Development, and “hey brother” was one of our favorite lines. We also loved the quote from the first episode:

Michael: What comes before anything? What have we always said is the most important thing?

George Michael: Breakfast.

Michael: Family.

George Michael: Family, right. I thought you meant of the things you eat.

Thomas has always sung his own tune, and been true to his own path. I think his clothes stand out to all of us as just an example. One year in elementary school Thomas decided he wanted to dress up for his class picture. So while all of the other kids wore jeans and boring shirts, he had on his full suit. Another time, when we were new to AL and he was only three years old a friend of mine came to our house to the first time and to this day we only remember this visit because Thomas was running around the yard in a pink leotard. He wasn't partial to pink, but he was particularly fond of the softness of the leotard. For the same reason he liked his tight swim jammers. And eventually he found his groove with Under Armour. Not a Christmas has passed the past ten years without a request for under Armour shirts, shorts, and boxers. I'm pretty sure the last piece of clothing he got was an Under Armour shirt I sent him to celebrate his 90 day chip. Thomas was very proud of this chip, rightfully so. We all are. We are so thankful to have had the last few months spent with Thomas being joyful months.

Gifts from Thomas were always exceptional. His fondness for the absurd was apparent in some that I remember- a giant plastic toothbrush, a cookie monster shirt, a welding magnet (I'm pretty sure it doesn't stick to our refrigerator, but rather actually hold up the entire fridge), a Mr. Rogers shirt saying “It's all good in the hood.”

So I think it's fair to say that Thomas would have described himself as weird. He was a big fan of Weird Al Yankovic, and in addition to his moniker Pyroman I think Weird T-Dawg could be his rapper name. And he was the best kind of weird. It brought out his kind and welcoming spirit. When someone else was too depressed, or too quiet, or too lonely, Thomas was ready to step in to bring some hope, some laughter, and some friendship. We all have days when we feel as though we don't fit in anywhere, but on those days Thomas is a reminder that we aren't alone. He is friend to the misfit and would put his arm around you to show you somewhere you do fit just the way you are.

In addition to being weird another word that describes him well is loyal. Thomas loved his many friends and family members. Many of his best friends he met in preschool, and early elementary school. And through the next 20 years he held on. Though paths may have crossed more frequently at times and less at others, he was still loyal. Some family members were hundreds of miles away, but he still held them tightly in his heart and with great respect. There were occasional arguments, distance, disagreements, separation over time, but Thomas was still grateful for all of us, and we are most grateful for him.

Thomas's love for all of us was fierce and strong. Driving to the airport I listened to a song that echoes a sentiment of my mom's. It says, "The greatest thing you'll ever know is just to love and be loved in return." You can look around the room and see that this is known.

Thomas often called our mom Meems. It was a nickname he had borrowed from his friend Ryan and changed just a little. In 2015, the week before his long hospitalization, my mom wrote a song (her first and only that I know of). It just came to her and she wrote it on a napkin. Over the next few days it played over and over in her mind. I wanted to share this with you from Meems.

**I come to You
With arms stretched open wide,
Hoping to be known
Wanting to be loved
Knowing I am but dust**

**You are God above
Holy, true & just
Power & majesty
are Yours alone**

I come to You

It's amazing grace

I know I keep switching tenses – present, past, (past perfect? I'm a math teacher not an English one). But it's still surreal that a few weeks ago I saw him alive, and just two days ago I saw him for the last time dead. Thomas was with us for 24 years. But he is also with us for the rest of our lives and then in our own deaths. We each carry pieces of Thomas- memories of him, interests held in common, attributes of his that rubbed off on us, the sound of his laugh in our head.

So Thomas, I'm sorry I'm not a poet, to do you justice; but even if I were it wouldn't be enough- you are loved beyond words. You make me laugh. I enjoy listening to your voice and learning about you. You cook me tasty food. My kids love you. You teach me stuff I would never have learned from anyone else in my life. You are creative, fun, and kind. But even if none of this were true, I would still love you just as much. You are my little brother.

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious unto you; the Lord turn his face toward you and grant you peace."

Catherine Cashio