

What can't be said

By [James Calvin Schaap](#)

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Didn't know him. Not at all. Never met him probably, although he might have been in a classroom sometime long ago when I visited his high school. I didn't know his wife or his family either, nor had I ever met them that I know of. But he was just a kid, too young to die.

His obit is so lovingly written that I could only hope to do it that well myself. It picks up incidentals, little things, and lifts them, like communion bread, to something almost eternal, something approaching pure music. It's perfectly beautiful.

It says he played soccer in high school and college, was a star, in fact. Says he loved the Packers. Says he and his father were rebuilding an old late '60s GTO out in the machine shed. Says that when he wasn't helping people with their insurance needs, he was always doing something, often enough tuned into a golden oldie station he loved.

There's more in his obituary than you'll find in any three or four obits from old folks three times his age combined. It's full of good things. He was a fireman in the burg where he lived. He loved farming and just this year had begun to invest in what might be, someday, his own livestock operation, a dream. People said he had a way with cattle that made them smile—people that is, maybe cattle too . . . who knows? Come harvest season, if he wasn't in his office, he was out in the fields around town helping out friends and neighbors. He was a good guy, but don't be fooled; he also loved being outside.

He was a reader, a college grad, someone who could spend hours devouring World War II history.

He was married, and, sadly, leaves a widow, someone who grew up in the same neighborhood. She may well be the writer who penned his wonderful obituary, a blessing, a tribute so warm that it brings tears to my eyes even if I didn't know him.

Still, it's almost impossible for me to think of her writing it, his young wife. Someone did; someone who knew him inside and out spelled out his life and loves and the reaches of his character. It almost had to be her. Neither of them were yet 30 years old. They had no children, which, right now, comes across almost as relief.

Everyone knew that he and the family in which he'd grown up were a close bunch. Arguments, sure—but he may well have had no closer friends than his own siblings. Once a week, clockwork, he stopped in at the old folks home to visit Grandma.

Considerate, helpful, loving, a hard worker. There is nothing in that blessed obituary to suggest the kid's end, which came at the end of a rope and therefore was not mentioned.

And the truth is, what you've just read includes all kinds of deliberate untruth, and I'm not saying what. Whoever wrote that marvelous obit chose not to bring up the subject of his death, and I'm lying to you just to avoid the truth.

What is true is that I didn't know the man, never met him, never met any member of his family before the kid died. None of them will read this, and that's the way I want it.

The awful fact that he died from suicide is so overwhelming and so oppressive that even here in a blog post no one who knew him and knows me will likely ever read, I too have to evade the truth, just as the writer who sat down one afternoon, pulled her heart out of her chest, and laid it on the desk in front of her just to write that loving obit.

Right now, as I'm typing these words, the funeral home's recorded piano solo of "Amazing Grace" is playing as background to the young man's obituary. It's on a loop and won't quit until I leave that page behind.

It's all we've got really, isn't it? What's coming up from those unseen keys right now in an eternal loop is really all there is worth saying, and all we can.

*Originally posted at [Stuff in the Basement](#)*