

Dear Mr. Cox,

It has taken me too long to write you. I was delayed by my own fear that your son was lost at the World Trade Center and by the challenge of finding out the truth and then locating you. I hope I am right to believe that, as Fred's father, you would want to hear from me even as you endure his loss. I am a writer who travels often on business. I met Fred in the last week of August on a flight from Los Angeles to New York with a stop in Las Vegas. We were both headed home, but he was intending to take a few hours in Vegas before catching a later flight to Kennedy.

For me, every flight is a chance to have a few precious hours of solitude, for reading, and just reflecting in a way that's almost impossible at home or work. I almost never engage in a long conversation with a seat-mate. Instead, I use body language and a book to create some space between me and the other passengers in our tiny, shared space.

However, on this flight I got bumped to first class, where the comfortable surroundings made me more relaxed. My seat was in the last row, by the window. The young man who got up to let me sit down smiled warmly, offered to hand my coat to the flight attendant, and told me his name—Frederick.

In that short flight Fred told me how much he loved his work, especially traveling to meet with clients, and how his life seemed to be taking a shape that made him very happy. His choice to work at a smaller firm was an example. He believed it gave him a chance to learn much faster, and he was grateful for the opportunity. (He was also very proud that he had been accepted at the company even though he didn't have the advantage of a Wharton or Harvard degree.)

On the personal side, Fred said that despite his intentions, he had fallen in love with a young woman whom he admired deeply, and he was discovering that the values and lessons he had been taught as a child—be honest, care for others, listen to your heart—really worked in adult life. Fred possessed a rare combination of idealism, intelligence and innocence that was very appealing.

When I confessed to Fred that I am a writer, and that I have written a couple of books on golf, he began telling me about you, the times you had spent together on various courses, and how much it meant to him to share the game with you. When I mentioned I had been a caddy at Wentworth by the Sea in New Hampshire he told me, rather excitedly, that you had been

a caddy as a boy and had worked in hotels in New Hampshire and elsewhere. “I just love caddies,” he said. “You guys really play the game for the right reasons, and appreciate it in ways the rest of us really don’t.”

Fred told me how much he valued his relationship with you. He described how you had begun a search for the ideal place to live the next stage of your life. And he spoke of your sense of adventure with great love and admiration. It was clear to me that Fred was able to embrace life so vigorously because it flowed from you, and from his mother.

When we landed in Las Vegas, Fred said good-bye and I went looking for something to eat during the layover. But before I ate, I stopped at a phone and called my wife to tell her about this extraordinary young man who seemed to have his feet on the ground even as he let his heart soar. After wandering the airport a bit, I boarded the plane to New York to discover that Fred was again in the cabin. He grinned, explained that his appointments had been canceled, and asked the person in the seat next to his to trade with me so we could resume our conversation.

On the flight to New York, Fred told me about his dream to convert his experience on Wall Street into a life of his own design. He talked about moving to a smaller town or city, opening a business—perhaps something in aviation—and devoting himself to both his own passions and his relationships with loved ones. What was most remarkable was Fred’s commitment to real values—friendship, love, service to others—and his rejection of stark materialism and self-involvement. He said the most important thing he had learned on Wall Street was that money is a means, not an end, and that a single-minded obsession with work was almost suicidal.

I hope you will tell Fred’s mother that he spoke at length to me about her as well. He talked about her teaching—he was genuinely awed by her ability to reach students—and about her unwavering love. At one point he reached for his computer, made a few clicks, and brought up a manuscript, complete with drawings, of a children’s book she had written and illustrated. (It had something to do with nutrition and health.) He made it clear to me that like you, she had been a major source of the values that guided him. She had taught him to love, and he was deeply grateful for that.

When we landed, Fred and I exchanged business cards and e-mail addresses. (A first for me with a fellow traveler.) We agreed to meet for lunch, and to play golf with you on Long Island, where I live. A few days later an e-mail arrived. I answered, and we had begun to schedule our

lunch. Though I am much older than Fred, I believed that I had met someone extraordinary, someone who would become a good friend. I knew that he was one of those rare people whose eyes were truly filled with light, whose heart was open, and whose mind was alert and ever at play.

I suspect that Fred affected everyone he met in the way that he affected me. Though he would likely have been the last one to say it, he was clearly a cut above the ordinary, a young man who gave freely of himself to others and approached life with a generosity and spirit that is exceedingly rare. You should know that he felt fully loved and supported by you and his mother. In turn, it was clear that he loved both of you very much. Indeed, I have never met a young man who seemed so certain about the gifts he had received, so happy with what he had, and so determined to share them with others.

Please accept my gratitude for your son and the time he shared with me. I am saddened by his loss, by the terrible fact that I won't have a long relationship with him. But I was blessed just to know he was in the world, and I hope you are warmed by knowing that he touched me very deeply. Please share my thoughts with Fred's mom. And you can both feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Michael D'Antonio