

Emma Diane Matthias Eulogy

If I lost all my breath and all my time and had to pack a whole incredible life into two words, those two words would be as plain-spoken as this: *GOOD LOVE*.

There's a centralized room at the hospital. Eighty monitors. Three people watching over everyone. Take measurements. Watch for changes. If something goes wrong, call the doctor. Call the nurse. Call a code.

Watch everyone's hearts.
Ba-Bum. Ba-Bum. Ba-Bum.

Of course, it was Emma Diane's job to tend to everyone's hearts. We all know that she was a drummer. Trust the drummer to handle the complexity of so many rhythms of so many parts of life. And to *be* the rhythm that keeps the song on track. Drummers are usually at the back, holding things down, while the rest of the band is in front, visible to the crowd, shining all the more riding on top of that thing that is sometimes more felt than understood.

Ba-bum. Ba-Bum. Ba-Bum.

On the morning I got the call that Emma Diane passed away, I did what she would have done. I held a baby. I walked her around the house while her parents were out. A gentle bouncing. Patting a rhythm on her bottom.

Ba-bum. Ba-Bum. Ba-Bum.

That woman was holding babies since the moment I was first near her.

While I was listening to the rhythm of my mother's heart preparing to be born, Matt was doing the same within Emma Diane. While we were listening, our mothers and fathers were close to each other, spending regular family time. We were babies together, toddlers, and kids.

I didn't know until recently that Bob Seger was her favorite. I suspect that Matt and I ever heard a few of his LPs muffled in amniotic fluid. Nobody's been able to tell me what her favorite Bob Seger song was. They've said that she could drum along to all of his songs. Since she's not here to keep the rhythm of this windy Matthias story, I hope that you'll help. Let's send Emma Diane off, with a minor adjustment on the last two lines of the chorus to one of his greats.

There she goes....
Turn the page.....

Divorce brings about change. In my life, that meant a father who eventually lived far away. There can also be lots of fear, worry, and pain around the changes. My father wasn't always around to be a bridge for me to the larger Matthias family. A mother's love has plenty of fear to it, and sometimes my mother had fears when sending me away from her to the family of my father. Fear can be loud and take over your thoughts, your feelings. It can be loud and feel like the truth. Sometimes they are rational. Sometimes they're not. And it's damn near impossible to tell the difference.

But there was this woman who could restore the rhythm. She could tend to the elevated heartbeat of fear. *Slow it down. There we go. Everything is going to be ok.* Emma Diane is largely responsible for both *why* and *how* I have had a relationship with the Matthias family. When she loved, she did not let go. And she loved *really* well.

Ba-Bum. Ba-bum. Ba-Bum.

When I see a phone call from Matt, it means one of two things. The first is that someone in the family has had something bad happen to them or has died. I've gotten a lot of those calls. And if there's someone I want to give me painful news, it's certainly Matt. The second reason that Matt calls is that he's on his way to Seattle and will be there in a few hours and wants to know if I'm around. I've gotten a *lot* of those calls as well. Either way, I want to take the call anytime Matt's name shows up on the screen.

While this spring I got that first kind of call, last fall as I made pizza dough for that evening I got the kind where he asks "Hey, what are you doing today?" Matt and Aunt Diane had been on a trip through Oregon and he'd rerouted their trip home to have a layover in Seattle for the afternoon.

As far as I understand it, that was her first trip to Seattle. I was ready to tour them around and show her the Emerald City. But the woman from Emerald Drive, was less interested in the Space Needle and the home of grunge than she was just being together. I cooked up a nice dinner. We made a fire. We did the Matthias thing and gave the latest news of daughters, a son, brothers, sisters, in-laws, a grandson, granddaughters, sons-in-law, and former sons-in-law, nieces, nephews, brothers, sisters, in-laws, all mixed in with the stories of long ago, from all across the arc of life.

When I dropped Matt and Emma Diane off and hugged them at the airport, I didn't know that would be the last time I saw her.

But there she goes...*Turn the Page.*

I don't follow baseball. I played backyard ball with my brothers and collected cards when I was a kid. However, living far away, I like to occasionally go to a Mariners game when they play the Tigers with a childhood friend who also lives in Seattle. He's as into it as Emma Diane was. By the way, I think the *D* on the hat stands for *Diane*. I asked him to tell me about loving baseball and loving the Tigers.

Ian explained how he was taught to love baseball by his grandfather. The grandfather passed along two things, the love of the Tigers and a hefty contempt for the Yankees. The Yankees are impressive. They win consistently and are a powerhouse club. But as nice as winning is, when it happens all the time, it lacks interest. To love the Tigers is the grinding pursuit of possibility within ordinary life. They struggle like us real people. And when they win, it is glorious. It is a joy that comes from showing up constantly, facing your defeats, dusting yourself off, and going at it again, and again.

Ba-bum. Ba-Bum. Ba-Bum.

This spring, Uncle Jim and Aunt Diane went to the season opener and cheered on the *Diane's* Tigers.

The other night Uncle Joe told the story of how they'd gone out on the field to watch batting practice and how thrilled Diane had been.

While the Tigers were her pro team, her real team was closer.

The most recent sports stars were Alexa Christine and Bree Emma. Hometown heroes in the first degree.

The common thread of every story that I've listened to over the last few weeks was how central family was for her. She cheered on that real team, whatever the activity, sports, cross country, hunting, fishing, travel, plays, school, art, careers, or relationships. And just like being a fan of the Tigers, when we win, it is glorious. But other times it's a heartbreak. She was there to go through that as well, showing up constantly, helping to face defeats, dust us off, and get us going at it again, and again.

Ba-Bum. Ba-Bum. Ba-bum.

There she goes....

Turn the Page.

A few years ago when Matt and I turned forty, Jim, Diane, Lena, Kaitlin, Matt, Jen, Jerry, Jenny, Max, Alexa, Bree, and I went to Redwoods National Park. In typical fashion, Emma Diane took photos of *everything*. We all know that she was the family documentarian and archivist. Jenny and Max were usually the leads on meals, keeping the rhythm of things. Where did they get that from?

It's not uncommon for families to love each other. But lots of families also have a *lot* of distance in them. Also, plenty of families that are in close proximity can get pretty toxic and rootbound stagnating growth. But that wasn't the case in the Redwoods because it's not the case here. I came out of that week of beautiful time with each other saying that this is the most cohesive family I've ever known. Family relying on each other; chopping veggies, playing with the kids. Family enjoying each other; stoking fires, telling tales. Family teasing each other and helping each other grow. That thing that's in everyone in the family? That comes from her.

Ba-Bum. Ba-Bum. Ba-Bum.

The Redwoods was also a great trip because it had so much time both together with everyone and breaking off for conversations between two people or several. It was great to be able to have a few walks—or legs of walks—just with her. She had a joy about her that was really beautiful to be around. She had a laugh that had a sparkle to it. And she had this very clear sense of right and wrong. The fastest way to land on the side of wrong was to hurt any of her family members in any way.

Talking with Lena this week, I asked about any time that Diane had been upset with her growing up. She said, “The worse thing you could do was disappoint Mom and Dad. When you did something wrong, she didn't turn away. She loved you harder.” Lena also said that when there was an issue, she'd say “I have a bone to pick with you.” And then she'd tell you all about it. And then you'd straighten up and get right.

Uncle Jim said the same thing last night as she said on my back porch last fall when I'd asked her about how they fought. Usually, one of them would walk off for a while and cool down. When they would reconnect, the conflict was usually all but gone. Who was right and who was wrong was much less important than being on each other's team.

That is amazing. To be able to directly address issues. To be able to give conflicts space to breathe. To not turn away, and to love harder.

Ba-Bum. Ba-Bum. Ba-Bum.

There she goes.... *Turn the Page.*

Jenny recalled how much Emma Diane loved music. She said, “I don't know a single person who could win against her in name that song. I remember sitting at the top of the basement steps when I was little and listening to her playing the drums along with her favorite records, Janice Joplin, Bob Segar, Pearl Jam, and Collective Soul. One of my favorite stories she would tell me was how she got to play the drums at Cobo Hall with Bob Segar while on a school field trip. She was around 12 or 13 years old. She loved going to concerts. She took me to see one of my first concerts, Def Leppard.”

Teen years are a peak time for a generational rift, and feeling misunderstood or not understood at all. I remember a trip to Jackson with Emma Diane and Matt. I bought my first CD to go with a CD player I'd just bought with the \$500 the government sent me when my father died. It was Pearl Jam's *Vs.* album. Matt bought the same tape.

There's a tendency for that generational rift to come with the older generation believing the music that was moving for them when they were young was when music was good, and that nowadays, music is just noise.

Emma Diane didn't do that. She didn't just tolerate our music. She didn't just give us space to explore it. She approached it with curiosity and *enjoyed* it. It cannot be overstated how important it is to have adults share in understanding and joy. She was that kind of special.

In addition to the gift of her presence, she was also *serious* about gifts and presents. Laura was telling me about how she never showed up empty-handed. There was always a small *something*. Apparently, there were gifts from Alaska for ages!

Lena said that every Mother's Day, Emma made sure that all her girls had a hanging flower basket. Christmas was always a grand event. She would be up until early the next morning wrapping presents and filling stockings. Even the pets got presents and stockings on Christmas. She brought the dogs presents on their birthdays usually treats and toys.

Emma Diane was deeply sentimental. Jim told me that she kept his W2s from a job he had over 50 years ago! It takes a *lot* of love to be sentimental over taxes.

Every once in a while I would get a card in the mail from her. Inside the card would be stuffed a small stack of photos of my dad, Grandma and Grandpa, me along with Matt, Jenny, and Lena. I love to let them get interspersed with the ordinary papers of life so that her little parcels of love surprise me again and again. It does a heart good.

Ba-Bum. Ba-Bum. Ba-Bum.

There she goes....*Turn the Page.*

Being a sentimentalist makes it hard to let go of things because everything is imbued with meaning. Everything becomes a treasure. Do you want to know what Sandy's highschool grades were? There's a report card in Emma Diane's care that will tell you. It is hard to get rid of a rock that you found in the Badlands. There's a giant ancient picture of Santa Clause hanging up in a prominent position year-round because it was Grandma and Grandpa Matthias's. The relics of family are sacred.

The home that she and Jim created is a museum of love.

The house itself has been under constant reimagining since they moved in thirty-some years ago. Always growing and changing.

The yard, once prairie, is now a forest. Trees uprooted from the Frog Patch golf course, now reach high into the sky.

The children were raised there. The grandchildren are spoiled there. The dogs have been held through the night on the floor so they were not alone after suffering a stroke, awaiting the opening of the vet's office.

The museum is open. The exhibits: priceless.

The collection of mementos, keepsakes, and beloved objects not only served as reminders of the past and the gifts that she'd received; they were also the raw materials that she used to draw out stories to give. "These lace gloves were a gift to me from your dad."

I was always starving for stories of my dad. Stories, like the ones that she shared generously, are how I knew him.

After the aneurysm, but before Emma Diane's death, Kaitlin wrote her grandmother a touching letter. She thanked her for her fascinating stories crossing a lifetime. She thanked her for her constant support. She took stock of the simple joys of time spent together at the Dollar General, thrifting, and—as corroborated by at least three other reliable witnesses—a love of Taco Bell.

Some goodbyes happen in person. Some happen at a distance. Some happen out loud. Some happen in the quiet inside of us. Some happen in the present. Some happen far into the future when we're finally ready. There's no right time. It's always the right time.

Ba-Bum. Ba-Bum. Ba-Bum.

There she goes...*Turn the Page.*

Jenny said “She loved to tell the story of how she and dad met. Any time we would drive through Milan she would point out the laundry mat they met at and tell us how handsome our long-haired, bearded father was, smoking his pipe and reading his book. Dad would follow that up with it was Mom’s red felt pants that got him.”

Uncle Jim and Aunt Diane are what good collaborative love can look like. Uncle Jim was better because he had her. Aunt Emma Diane was better because she had him. Their life together was constant creation. A constant rhythm of planting and harvesting. Putting seeds in the ground and smelling the flower blossoms. One cooking up some venison or cracking open a jar of summer tomatoes and the other doing the dishes. Pouring love and time into their kids and them growing up into thoughtful loving adults who also grow into friends. Working hard and then traveling to see the lighthouses of Michigan or the Great Smokey Mountains. It’s loving on Alec, Corina (Crayola), Kaitlin, Alexa, and Bree.

Ba-Bum. Ba-Bum. Ba-Bum.

I’m not a believer in a great hereafter. Just the complicated beauty of here. And for those of you who see it differently, please suspend your belief for just a moment.

She did good. It’s a world that can be mean. Can turn a person mean. Can have you good and ready to leave when your time is up. But when her time was up, Emma Diane was even more kind, more full of love, than any amount of loss, suffering, or hardness could have ever tried to take from her.

After this big, full, well-lived life just *drenched* in love, living that *good love*, the last thing she experienced consciously was an adventure to sit at the table of her sister. And then, while unconscious, to be surrounded by the family that she’d spent a lifetime loving, standing constant vigil, taking care of each other, grieving, loving. Loving. My goodness, so much loving.

Well, if indeed this is all there is to life, I can’t imagine anything better than that.

Ba-Bum.

Ba-Bum.

Ba-Bum.

There she goes....

Turn the Page.

Some of you *do* believe in a great hereafter following this complicated existence. I'd like to suspend my own disbelief for a moment.

The place, Heaven. Because if she doesn't get in, I don't know who could. It looks a lot like Deerfield, and Frankfort, and the Redwoods, and the Smokies, with a lighthouse somewhere in there. There is no knee pain to speak of.

Now I don't know much about the England family, but I know who from the Matthias family is there. Grandma, Grandpa, Uncle Don, Aunt Caro, Uncle Mark, Tyler, Donna, and my Dad. Oh Hell! Grandma is going to be so relieved to see Emma Diane with that basket of rascals. Someone's got to get all those chuckleheads in line! I hope they're all lining up to hug her and love on her for infinity.

And speaking of Grandma, here's another thought from Uncle Joe. While we all have a little bit of Grandma magic, as far as who has that same ability to sniff out those people who need a little extra love, whether that's a matter of right now or for a longer part or even an entirety of life, Emma Diane is who had that. She had Grandma's thoughtfulness, patience, and charm. She had the ability to hold our stories, to beam with pride, to nurse our wounds. This is only part of her story. We all have more to say.

She kept the rhythm. She was the heartbeat.

Now we must tell the stories.

Now we must keep the rhythm.

Good-Love.

Good-Love.

Ba-Bum.

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