

An open letter to Caty Delwiche on the occasion of your memorial service at Myers Field House— October 17, 2007

Dearest Caty:

I would have to admit I am bit conflicted in my role this evening. While it is certainly an honor and privilege to serve as the host for these services as we gather together to celebrate your life, I am less than certain that I should be the one standing here. It is very unfortunate, on one hand, that I hardly had the opportunity to get to know you in the brief time that you were with us in Mankato. We may have passed in the hallway near the training room, exchanged pleasantries at the Presidential Scholar's luncheon, or bumped into one another at the All-Student athlete meeting to start the school year. In that context, I am quite certain that there are many amongst the hundreds gathered here tonight that knew you far better and could do much better than I might in leading this service.

On the other hand, I have learned a great deal about you in the little over two weeks since your passing. There is hardly a day that goes by that I don't hear a "Caty story" or learn something new about you. It is clear to me in the days since the accident that you had many friends and had touched and positively impacted the lives of more people than you can probably imagine. The story of how you lived your life is a good one—it's been retold by media from all over the state many times, recollected by your teammates and friends, and shared publicly at your funeral service by your dad and Pastor Randy. It's a story about your passion, spirit, and dedication and it is a story about the faith that underlies it all. And as I related to the media in a press conference the day after you were killed, these are the elements that will leave an indelible impression on all of us and that will become your enduring memory and everlasting inspiration.

And oh what an inspiration you have been. On the weekend of what would have been your first race at Minnesota State, your teammates ran in your honor at aptly named Land of Memories in an open meet that has now been permanently renamed the Caty Delwiche Memorial Open. You are joined here tonight by those same teammates, along with hundreds of other Maverick student-athletes and coaches. We miss you dearly and are desperately trying to heal as a family united in our passion for sport. You have become a rallying point for all of our teams and there are countless athletes who carry on in your memory and know that you are there with them on the field, in the batters's box, at the pool, on the track, or wherever they may go in competition.

You may be gone in body, but not in spirit, and you will be remembered forever. We will plant trees at the accident site and outside the track and field offices and mark them with memorial stones, so that all those who pass in those directions in the future will share the good fortune of knowing your story. We know how much running meant to you and you will now always have a place with us in Myers Field House, as we will place a permanent memorial there for you, as

well. You were the consummate student-athlete with an equally strong commitment to academics as you had for athletics, as evidenced by your status as class valedictorian and your selection as a Presidential Scholar, and to that end, we are in the planning stages of establishing a scholarship in your name that will be awarded annually to a recipient that bears the same virtues of your goodness.

A little over ten days ago, I attended your memorial service in Hutchinson. It was a beautiful event and it was wonderful to have the opportunity to meet so many of your friends, family, and acquaintances. I recall Pastor Randy addressing the question of “Why” and noting that this would be one of the biggest challenges for those gathered there to answer in the weeks and months ahead. He suggested we may never know, but that it didn’t matter, because there was a plan for everyone’s life and that what was most important was in understanding how your own tragedy might be the impetus for personal change in our own lives.

Pastor Randy said that if your passing changed just one person, that some how, some way, this might all be worth your personal sacrifice. I would caution to say that you have probably already had a far greater impact than changing just one person’s life, but I offer my own personal testimony as witness to the great work that is likely just beginning with others you have also inspired in the same way. There is a lot of irony in the events of the last two weeks, not the least of which is this role-reversal of sorts that you and I are playing out. You see, it’s my job and the job of our coaches to be the source of inspiration to the more than 550 student-athletes who participate in the program. It’s a bit humbling to be following the lead of a teenager, but I can honestly say that you may have accomplished more in your relatively short time here on Earth than most people will accomplish in a lifetime.

Your untimely death and what I have learned about you since then has truly inspired me. It’s inspired me to become a better leader within our athletic department for our coaches, student-athletes, and staff. Some of that had to happen very quickly, as I will admit I was fairly ill-equipped in never having dealt with a tragedy like this in my nearly 18 years as an athletic administrator. It was hard to stand by and watch the hurt and agony of your close friends like Amber, Laura, and Sam, but I believe you gave me the courage of knowing when to speak and what to say and the wisdom to know when to say nothing at all. I believe I can grow from this experience and now hope that I can revel less in the wins and losses and instead begin to find more satisfaction in the process of the total development of our student-athletes, as they mature during their time with us as future community leaders.

In your memory, I also pledge to become a better father, husband, and individual, in general. That’s quite a bit of change to undertake and I believe some would be a bit skeptical that anyone might be so dramatically affected by any one event, such as this. I guess I would respond by saying that we never know when we will encounter such “life changing” moments, but if nothing else, the suddenness of our own loss with you has made it abundantly clear that life is fragile and we need to appreciate what we have and keep things in proper perspective from day to day. It is pretty easy in Athletics, or any other career for that matter, to get carried away with work and the long hours it can bring, and because of it, lose sight of the more important things around us, and that was probably the case for me.

In your honor, I have tried to make a change at home. As the father of two young daughters, I hope you understand that I can pay you no higher compliment than to say that my daughters could probably have no better role model and there could be no greater outcome than to have them turn out very much like you. Because of you, their stories about friends and school are no longer a distraction from work that I have brought home and the goodbyes as we part ways have become a little more meaningful each and every day.

Your parents have been amazing throughout this. I remember watching your father during the funeral service and wondering how I would handle the same experience and then marveling at his amazing strength and courage in the face of sorrow all around him. I heard him talk about your personal commitment to Jesus as your savior and how the family faith would be a source of strength in moving forward. This too, has been a source of inspiration for me, and I have committed myself to exploring my own faith in a much deeper and more meaningful way, as I continue a journey of spirituality that has suddenly become more focused.

As I mentioned, I am probably just one of many who you have inspired, changed, or begun to have an impact on. I could probably go on much longer, but I am certain that this is just the beginning of the difference you will make in my life and for so many others, so I will check in with you again at another time. Pastor Randy said there would be moments where we would feel empty and helpless in the face of your passing, but that if we wanted to do something for Caty—something that you would be proud of—then we should try to make a positive change in our lives. In your remembrance I have taken up that personal challenge and as I now toe the line—like you did so many times at the start of an important race—I find myself filled with your courage and passion, as I set about running in a new and more meaningful direction for my life. Caty, thank you for being my inspiration and for providing direction on the road that I now follow in your memory.

Good night and God bless!

Sincerely,

Kevin Buisman  
Director of Athletics