



Benjamin William McDowell

August 20, 1976 - February 12, 2021

Everyone who knew Ben McDowell understood they were in the presence of one larger than life. From his towering height and impossibly handsome mug to his irrepressible personality and relentless humor, Ben was a force to be reckoned with.

Benjamin William McDowell died unexpectedly and peacefully on February 12, 2021 in Tacoma, Washington. He was 44.

Ben is survived by his children, Nevaeh Gloko, Maya Cade McDowell, and Caelyn Faye McDowell as well as Janice Gloko. He is also survived by his mother Cindy Visnich Weeks; his father Grier Weeks; his brother, Jason McDowell; and his sister Millie Weeks. He leaves behind his beloved grandmother, Irene Miele Visnich, grandparents Sally and Wesley Weeks, and an extended, loving family. Ben was predeceased by Jay McDowell. Also surviving are brothers and sisters McKenzie Gnagey, Curran McDowell, Cecelia Muzika-Minteer and Veronica Witte.

Benjamin William McDowell was born in 1976 in Washington, Pennsylvania. His first home with his big brother Jason was a farmhouse, surrounded by farmers' fields. He spent his early childhood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, moving at the age of 10 to Mt. Rainier, Maryland and soon thereafter to Asheville, North Carolina.

As a young man, Ben's first calling was documentary photography. He was drawn to the streets, migrant labor camps, and other hidden corners of life, where his ease with strangers allowed him in. As a student, stringer, and then daily newspaper photographer, his gifted photography earned professional respect and awards. Yet, journalism could not hold his interest, and in his early 20's he began to roam.

His first travels were to Europe, retracing the path of his grandfather, William Visnich, through Europe in World War II. Ben also spent time at the homes of his grandmother Irene's ancestral family in Rome, the Miele family, which brought great joy to both sides of the family.

Soon, though, he abandoned the conventional guidebooks, traveling through post-war Bosnia, in western states and to the Mexican border, and eventually to remote Alaskan villages. There he worked many years on fishing boats as well as for the Alaska Railroad in Anchorage. Ben was drawn to the sea, becoming a merchant marine and working on marine research vessels from New England to Florida. He said he was happiest during the harshest of maritime adventures.

Settling in Dillingham, Alaska, Ben founded Motive Power Marine, a boat repair company serving the Bristol Bay salmon fishing fleet. During this time, he married Janice Gloko, and their family grew to five. Ben and Janice employed a dynamic partnership to raise their children together. Ben's love for his family was at the core of his being, and nowhere was it more evident than with his young children, Nevaeh, Maya, and Caelyn.

In 2016, Ben moved Motive Power Marine to the Port of Tacoma, transitioning from a fishing fleet repair outpost to the first newly permitted shipyard in the State of Washington in a quarter century, Motive E-Port Shipyard. With little start-up capital but enormous entrepreneurial spirit, Ben and Motive utilized relatively low-cost airbag technology to compete with large, established drydock facilities in the Seattle-Tacoma region. Soon, Motive Power was rolling 400 foot barges and Navy vessels out of Puget Sound and into its yard.

In 2019, Ben suffered a motorcycle accident at the Port that nearly cost him his life. He would frequently say it was one of the best things that ever happened to him, ushering in a rare closeness with his loved ones. By this time, Motive Power's daily operations were under the oversight of J.D. Schultz, enabling Ben to complete a long recovery and devote more time to his family. Today, Motive Power Marine remains under the capable management of Mr. Schultz, who says learning from Ben's "can-do" spirit helped prepare him to lead the company.

Following his accident, family began to hear from Ben every day, and came to marvel at their good fortune. Ben's mother Cindy, who Ben called "Mommy Mom," recalls that they spoke daily about "everything and nothing," including politics, the economy, recipes, and things as simple as their tooth brushing routines. Many photos, articles, jokes, photos, and memes were sent back and forth.

In the weeks prior to his death, Ben was reminiscing about his childhood with Cindy. She recalls a spirited text message debate including maps and hand drawn routes arguing about where the "magic pond" was in the woods near his grandparents' family home.

Cindy deeply grieves the loss of her middle child.

Ben's grandmother, Irene Miele Visnich, also greatly misses Ben's laughter, affection, and attentiveness. Ben adored Nana, a Navy veteran, asking every day about her. His last gift to her was a large, framed photograph of him with his children that she cherishes.

In his last years, more than ever before, Ben McDowell's life revolved around his daughters, Maya and Caelyn, and his son Nevaeh, from dawn to night. He cooked and nurtured, oversaw online school, and led daily excursions to parks, waterways, golf courses and mountaintops. He described his children in affectionate terms: "cuteness overload," "strong force," "awesome kid," always calling them his "best friends."

Upon his death, Ben's daughter Maya remembered that Ben had taught her, "Life is a series of challenges," a lesson she said would guide her life. His daughter Caelyn remembered how Ben's infectious personality touched everyone he met, recalling that, "My dad was kind to everyone." Nevaeh shared a bond with Ben as the only two "men" in the family and will remember his generosity of spirit and special gifts.

Ben's father Grier remembers Ben as a man who made everyone around him a better, more optimistic person. He is most proud of his son's constant curiosity, entrepreneurial spirit, and love of his children, and he mourns the loss of their daily conversations.

Ben will also be missed by his extended Gloko family in Manokotak and Dillingham Alaska, who taught him their Yup'ik customs—hunting for wild game, cast net and ice fishing, and traditional food preservation. He loved all of these customs and with Janice worked at learning the very complex Yup'ik language.

Ben's big brother, Jason, and his little sister, Millie, are heartbroken. These three siblings were the apples of each others' eyes—there are so many memories between them and this special kinship will continue in his memory.

Ben's older brother Jason also was reminiscing with Ben in the weeks prior to his death. Jason remembers being responsible for his little brother, having to make sure he got on the right school bus in elementary school. They shared a bedroom all during childhood and when they finally got their own bedrooms, they decided to move back in together, missing each other. Jason dragged his bed over to Ben's room and they said that they wanted the other room as their playroom. The two brothers loved to fish together, in local streams and lakes, and on the coast with Pop Pop. They were as close as two brothers could get, alternatively fighting and making up all in the course of a day.

Ben was the first person to hold his sister Millie other than her parents after she was born so they had a special connection. Millie remembers Ben as the funniest person ever, teasing her mercilessly until she got mad but he was always able to make her smile again. Ben was there to listen to Millie about her trials and tribulations as she grew up, and she watched and admired him as he pursued his dreams and solo travels courageously. Millie looked up to Ben and he inspired courage in her life—to do the hard things—and letting her know that she could be an independent and brave woman. They were also known as epic cuddlers together.

The family would like to extend our appreciation to everyone who has reached out to us with condolences and special memories of Ben. Memorial contributions may be made for the benefit of Ben's children. If you would like to make a contribution, please contact the family.

Comments



“ 27 files added to the tribute wall



Cindy Weeks - March 27 at 08:35 PM



“ 5 files added to the tribute wall



Cindy Weeks - March 27 at 08:29 PM