

Jim. The Gloucester Education Foundation. Johnny.

Journal Entry by Bo Abrams



Jim. The Gloucester Education Foundation. Johnny.

What do they have in common?

Learning is their highest priority.

And

Two of them are dead.

Johnny died the day before his own birthday.

November 16.

From an overdose.

That's all I know. It sucks.

I hear you now. "What the fuck Bo. You can't tell people Jim's younger brother Johnny died in a post for Jim's birthday!"

But I can and I have to and I don't want to wait and it's all connected.

Besides, Jim hated his birthday.

He'd prefer we told you about hard things on this day and not spoil another perfectly good day.

Johnny'd been mostly clean the last time I saw him, the week before Jim died.

Johnny was as smart and funny and charismatic as Jim.

Jim used to say Johnny was the smarter one.

I tell you this not to compare them, but so you understand the caliber of kid Johnny was.

Johnny was clever and a lot of fun.

But he didn't have this one thing: Support outside his family that offered not just a view to another path, but an actual mentor to help him get on or stay on the path when it could have made a difference.

I'm not judging addiction here.

I am judging our systems which allow so many kids to fall through the cracks.

Yesterday Treely went with the Docksiders to Beeman Elementary School to give a performance.

Seeing the high school band come into his elementary school was part of what got him jazzed about music to begin with. Then it was the instrument petting zoo. Then it was getting bused to after-school lessons with friends at the middle school. When he was in middle school, it wasn't the academics that made him want to go to school. It was getting to go into the music room or doing a science project. Playing music makes his day better.

When he got to high school Treely thought he'd give it up. Playing trumpet that is. Band didn't fit in his schedule. He didn't want to practice. He told me he wasn't going to be a professional musician. Why bother?

Of course I thought he should keep going. But, it wasn't my voice that convinced him to stay when he was ready to quit. It wasn't his dad. His dad had died about three months earlier. It was the voice of some other adult that made him willing to stay. I don't remember who it was now, maybe it was you. Who cares. I'm fucking grateful. He stayed in band. He stuck it out over a hard patch. I needed that. *He* needed that.

Anyway, back to the Docksiders and driving to school.

Treely has his permit and has driven enough these days so I no longer point out insanity in the gauntlet that is driving across Gloucester. Instead I watch the people on the side of the road.

I see kids waiting for the bus. I see people getting ready for work. I see homeless people leaving the shelter. After dropping him off sometimes I see the kids who missed the bus walking to school. It's the same kids, always late. Too many times a week.

I see a Johnny and Jim of the past.

You know where this is going right? You know that it's the little things that add up.

You know one kid started missing the bus more and the other one started missing it less.

Jim talked a lot about all the people who mentored him along the way from the time he was about 12. It wasn't any one person. But it was one person at a time, one interest at a time, one program at a time, that helped him survive to get to the next thing. Someone to give a nudge to stick with it when something was hard. Someone to suggest a book or a program. Someone to talk about colleges or vocations or hopes and dreams.

Johnny never had that. Jim hated that.

It's both the fact that there is a band program and the fact there was someone who wasn't me who was there for Treely in a way I couldn't be. It's because of the combination of these things that Treely is thriving, not just as a musician.

Is he gonna be a famous jazz trumpet player? Probably not, but who cares?

You and I can give an occasional ride. And we try to. But like I said earlier, it was a combination of rides and programs that helped Treely, and also allowed Jim to survive and eventually thrive.

Which leads me to Gloucester Education Foundation. They are the reason there is a band program and a hundred other programs that make sure practically every kid has something they can connect to in school. And they're adding more. GEF is starting a mentor program at the high school in conjunction with Wellspring. And they just helped GHS get a grant to bring in an administrator in the vocational program. They are also beginning a student advisory group so students can have a say in GEF leadership which offers a stipend, because you can't do internships for free if you have to make money.

The kids and I want to help. You may remember we collected money in honor of a Jim Dowd Scholarship Fund. Because of how much GEF does to help Gloucester's kids, we've decided to transfer all that scholarship money to the GEF. The Jim Dowd Fund at the Gloucester Education Foundation will support the stipend with a goal of bringing student voices to the organization that may not otherwise be heard.

Is this gonna help all the kids?

No.

But it might help one.

So in honor of Jim's birthday and his brother John Robert Dowd's memory.

Please help us grow this program.

Think about every time you would have bought Jim a beer if you had the chance.

Or texted a funny meme. Or just cursed his being.

and [donate](#) to the GEF in both their memory

so the Johnnys can be offered opportunities to thrive like the Jims.

JOHN ROBERT DOWD

November 16, 1969 - November 15, 2021

May he rest in peace

May his memory be a blessing

May the wind be always at his back

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