

On the count of three, I'd like everyone to hold your breath for 30 seconds. One. Two. Three. Breathe. It's hard, isn't it? not knowing when your next breath will come.

Some of you know my connections with the Drummond family go all the way back to happy memories in 2nd grade and sorrowful memories of other funerals. You may not know that I also have a connection with the Corsentino family, a coincidence that goes back 27 years. In the summer of 1972 I'd just finished my freshman year at Conception Seminary College and I landed a job in Kansas City as a typist. I was a wiz at a typewriter, 70 words per minute, no problem. I got hired by a local charity in pre-computer days to type address labels for the mailing of their annual appeal. Quite honestly, it was the most boring job I ever held. I still remember the day our supervisor Katherine Mullaly walked into the office and announced somewhat fearfully because she knew we had our hands full with these labels that she needed someone to type a letter. The typist at the next desk gasped like someone who hadn't drunk water in days. "Give it to me!" he pleaded. "Sentences!" he cried out. "Paragraphs!" It was like seeing a mirage in the desert. The charity we were working for was the National Cystic Fibrosis Research Foundation, the Heart of America Chapter, serving Western Missouri and Eastern Kansas. Little did I know that as I cranked out those labels that very summer, a little girl named Joanne Corsentino learned she had this disease. I feel like I'm typing out one more label this summer, and I'm addressing it to God for Joanne.

Joanne's father tells me he remembers when she was born. She looked like a perfect baby. And she was. She was also a perfect wife, a perfect mother, and a perfect patient. I always thought she was a perfect beauty, inside and out. Last night when Christopher told me his mom was going to be happier in heaven than she was here, Zach said she would be the prettiest angel in heaven. I think those kids are pretty smart.

Nobody suffered like Joanne. Nobody. CF is a very difficult disease. It needs more research. It needs more funding. We need more organ and tissue donors. Joanne never lost hope. She took treatments. She wanted a cure. She waited for lungs. Anything. Through it all we knew she was not supposed to last this long, and it's a credit to her determination, her optimism, her faith in God, and her love for her family that she did. The contrast between her suffering and her hope was just extraordinary. I guess that's why so many of us were touched by her. Whenever we wanted to complain about our problems, our aches and pains, our sorry lot in life -- all we had to do was look at Joanne. There we saw this remarkable person whose suffering made our suffering look puny, and whose hope made ours look puny. For someone who spent so much of her life in some kind of confinement, she managed to be free. I don't know about you but I'm a bundle of mixed emotions. I'm feeling sad that we've lost her, but oh I'm feeling happy for Joanne. She lived life well. She crammed a lot into 34 years. Another word for inhale is inspire. And that's what Joanne did. With every breath she took she took our breath away.

When the gospel writers described the death of Jesus, they all did it

in the same way. They didn't say his heart stopped. They said he breathed his last. He died in activity. He breathed. In fact John says he handed over his breath, he handed over his spirit. Let me tell you, it was that breath of Jesus Christ which gave Joanne life. The Spirit of Christ was pure oxygen for her. In her brief life she lived for Christ, who offers us eternal life. Our suffering is nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed in us through the mercy of the risen Christ.