



Matthew "Matty" Quallen

July 29, 1961 - April 10, 2021

Matthew Joseph Quallen was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts on July 29, 1961. He passed away there on Saturday, April 10, 2021. He was 59.

Matthew was a beloved son, brother, brother-in-law, uncle, and friend. He was also my eponym, and I am his namesake. To all of us, he was Matty.

Matty spent the first year of his life with his six siblings in their home on Ascii Drive. There, he was everyone's favorite. Matty wasn't a crier and he loved music: he would sit peacefully in front of the stereo for hours, so long as someone kept the turntable stacked with records.

But Matty was born with Down Syndrome and a badly compromised immune system. If the constant presence of his many siblings brought Matty great joy, it also brought the risk of infection and illness. Ultimately, Matty's doctor recommended that he be sent to a sterile nursery at Belchertown. Reluctantly, Matty's parents agreed and so he went. From then on, his family would load into the station wagon each Sunday and make the drive to Belchertown. Matty's parents were allowed in to see him while his brothers and sisters would wave to him through the windows.

Time passed and Matty grew older. So did his brothers and sisters; some went off to college and the entourage that made the weekly trek to Belchertown grew smaller. But, as Matty grew stronger and his siblings became more scattered, Matty was allowed out of the sterile facility. At last, his family could take him out for a ride in the car, a visit to a local park, and—critically—a stop at the ice cream stand, where Matty, beaming, would devour an entire dish of

his choice.

Ultimately, the day came when all of his siblings had gone on to college and Matty no longer needed the sterile environment at Belchertown. He entered the general population there and the visits became less frequent. When my dad eventually found his way to Amherst as a UMass student, weekends with Matty once again became a part of his life.

He and Matty shared a sense of fun and of mischief. On summer days, my dad would snatch a giant cardboard box from the dumpster behind Aubuchon Hardware Store, pick up Matty, and steal off to Quabbin Reservoir to go sliding down the grass slope of the dam.

It was a ludicrous setup. The pitch of the dam, just off Belchertown Road, was impossibly steep. My dad, at six-feet, three inches, stood almost a foot taller than five-foot-five Matty. They would cram onto Aubuchon's flattened cardboard box, with Matty between my father's legs, and set off down the dam, riding faster and faster. At least once, about halfway down the hill, Matty turned around and grabbed my dad around his neck; their corrugated sled hit a bump and sent them flying—ass over teakettle in my dad's words. When the pair finally came to a rest, bruised and tangled in every which way, Matty began to laugh and dance. Matty wanted to go again. These adventurous visits all ended more or less the same way: Matty and my Dad licked their wounds over a visit to the ice cream stand.

More time passed and my Dad moved on to a job far away. Matty moved from Belchertown to a group home in Pittsfield run by BCARC. Matty was home, and his parents were thrilled to have him nearby once again. For a time, life was good.

But life could also be capricious and short. Dorothy, Matty's mom, was diagnosed with the brain cancer that would soon take her life. And Raymond, Matty's dad, died suddenly of a heart attack. In their will, Matty's parents established a trust to care for Matty. They also designated my dad as Matty's trustee and guardian. And so, with the help of Cyndi, Sharon, Sheila, Chrissie, and John, he became not just Matty's big brother, but also his keeper.

For Matty, little changed at first. He remained happily ensconced in a well-run group home in West House. It was a beautiful home with a wonderful staff, and an idyllic setting for a young man who had spent far too long isolated at Belchertown.

But, circumstances, as is sometimes their wont, again intervened. West House lacked a fire sprinkler system and automatic fire doors. So, in order to remain there, residents had to show that they could respond to fire alarms and evacuate whenever a fire drill was conducted. Matty managed to respond to the first of several of these drills. But eventually he decided fire drills were a waste of his time. It was a sympathetic decision: It's easy to understand why a warm bed beats a trek to a cold driveway at 3 am. But it also meant that Matty would need to move out of West House. Thus began Matty's odyssey—the 16-year journey that would bring him to his loving home at Whittier Ave.

At that time, my dad was just learning the ropes of being Matty's guardian. He was undergoing the tortuous legal process of actually being recognized as Matty's guardian and learning just how many everyday decisions he needed to make for Matty so that the wheels of the bureaucracy didn't fall off. It was in that course of those duties that my Dad met Donna Chauvin. Donna was Matty's education specialist and one of his fiercest advocates. Donna wanted two things for Matty: she wanted my Dad to intervene in the local school system's decision to terminate Matty's school eligibility and she wanted to send Matty on a vacation. The vacation part was easy: All my dad had to do was say yes. The intervention with the school system was a bit more difficult, but Donna Chauvin and Mark Quallen succeeded, and a fruitful partnership was born.

Although Matty was well-cared for by BCARC, life in a series of care facilities was difficult and over years he became increasingly unhappy. But Matty was also fortunate: over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, Matty's trust had grown in value. Ken Singer, the CEO of BCARC, my Dad, and the rest of Matty's family hatched a plan to try a new model for a group home. Matty's

trust would buy a house and BCARC would staff it if Matty would agree to have a housemate. Matty soon moved into 17 Whittier Avenue in Pittsfield with Joe Ostrander, who became his best friend for the last 23 years of Matty's life. Sue DeRosia became their live-in house manager and de facto mother. This loving and accidental family flourished for the next 16 years, until Sue became too sick to continue. But during her tenure, Matty and Joe had the time of their entire lives. Matty, Joe, and Sue went everywhere together: shopping, vacations, walking, dances, diners, and movies. Sue was a ferocious guardian. Great misery befell any who would dare mess with Matty and Joe. She enriched their lives beyond measure. We thank Sue for all she did for Matty and Joe and we miss her.

For the Quallen siblings, the upkeep of 17 Whittier Avenue became something of a cottage industry. Matty's brother John and nephew Michael mowed the lawn, made emergency repairs and, kept Sue happy. His sister Christine became the family bookkeeper, making sure my Dad reported the facts—and nothing but the facts—to the IRS. I am assured by him that it is to her great credit the trust escaped audit for those 23 years. Cyndi, Sharon, and Sheila comprised the social committee and commanded attendance for Matty's Christmas party and most especially his Birthday each summer. For each of them, as for me, 17 Whittier served as a nucleus for our family. For that, we are grateful. Matty's binding role in our lives will be impossible to replace. But much of Matty remains. Perhaps selfishly, I think of that partnership between my dad and Donna Chauvin, my mom. Donna and Mark ultimately married and when I was born they made me Matty's namesake—the less charming of the two Matthew Quallens.

Matty will be remembered for his mischievous humor. Though Matty didn't speak, he was a legendary jokester. You had best watch out or he would catch you while were napping, or give you a noogie if you were too slow to escape his grasp.

Matty will be remembered for the things he loved. He loved the ladies in his life, he loved a beer on his birthday, he loved good food, he loved big hugs,

WWE, and bold shoe-laces. And of course he loved ice cream, maybe too much. When my mom needed to spend time with Matty, she would take him to Friendly's. A hot fudge Sunday was the price for his attention.

Matty will also be remembered for the people he loved. Joe and Sue, his many affectionate caregivers and advocates, his parents, his brothers and sisters, his nieces and nephews.

And Matty will be remembered by the people who love him. Both because he has bound each of us together, and for the lesson that the best lives are those where difference is cherished.

Matty was one of-a-kind. He was cherished by all. And we will miss him terribly. We are all heartbroken to say goodbye.

Godspeed, Matthew. You will be remembered often.

To those who would wish, donations in Matty's memory can be made to BCARC, in care of the Dwyer Funeral Home, 776 North Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201.

Cemetery Details

St. Joseph Cemetery

222 Peck's Rd.
Pittsfield, MA 01201

Previous Events

Service

APR 15. 1:00 PM (ET)

St. Joseph Church
414 North St.
Pittsfield, MA 01201

Tribute Wall

JF

“ To all the Quallen family and friends; Although I never had the pleasure of meeting your Matty, I am so grateful that my daughter, Leslie, forwarded what I think is the most beautiful, loving tribute I have ever read, speaking not only to Matty's endearing qualities but also to the beauty of strength of family. My deepest sympathy to you all. It is trite, but true--you have many loving memories to sustain you in your loss. May it be so.

Joyce Falkin

Joyce Falkin - April 21, 2021 at 11:21 AM

DC

“ Mark, John, Chrissy and the rest of the Quallen Family. My sincere condolences. I remember way back, when Mark and my mom (Dale) were dating, wrestling with Matty on the living room floor of the lanesboro house. He was the sweetest and strongest guy ever. Once he had hold of you, you weren't getting away until he decided to let you go. And that laugh. That infectious laugh, there was nothing like it. This is a beautiful tribute to a beautiful human being. I am very sorry for your loss.

Douglas Carlson (Twining)

Douglas Carlson - April 16, 2021 at 11:20 AM

MA

“ *What a wonderful tribute on a remarkable life! Your words carry the love all of you feel for Matty and indicate the depth of your grief at his passing. We hope our prayers help to lift the burden and enable you to share in the joy of his life.*

Our parents were honored to serve as Matthew's Godparents. While only knowing him as the infant and child Matthew , he remained in their prayers throughout their lives. God blessed them in sharing the infant Matthew; He gifted all of you with Matty the boy and man.

Thank you for sharing the story of his life with us.

The Kline Family

Dave and Jean

Mark, Mary Joan, Paul, Meg and Kevin

Mary Joan (Kline) Andrelos - April 14, 2021 at 10:39 PM

NH

“ *I have lived next door to Matt and Joe the entire time they lived here. Your family had a welcome to the neighborhood party when they moved in and my husband and I met them then. We loved both Matt and Joe and adored Sue. When she lived there, I'd often go over for a cheap beer in the evening. And Matt and Joe loved her. I used to smile in the mornings when I could hear her ordering them around to pack their lunch before the bus came. If they were too slow..shed call them lazy and they loved her. I can add one more thing I know Matt loved...he loved balloons. And after any of my kids had a birthday party..id take over a balloon and he loved it. I miss very much the Sue, Matt and Joe fun neighbors and I'm so very sorry for your loss.*

Nancy hudlin - April 14, 2021 at 08:27 PM

LH

“ Linda Kensell Hartford lit a candle in memory of Matthew "Matty" Quallen



linda Kensell Hartford - April 14, 2021 at 07:30 AM

AK

“ What can I say Uncle Matty. Gone to soon for sure and will be missed by all who knew you and loved you. Your infectious smile is what I loved most and will miss. Now you watch all the WWE you want in heaven. Tell those Angels to watch over you. I love you Uncle Matty!❤️🙏❤️

Adina Klein - April 13, 2021 at 10:24 PM



“ Beautiful tribute, Matthew. Your spirit was and is beautiful, sweet Matty. I hope they have WWE in the sky 💜

Nicole Quallen - April 13, 2021 at 02:44 PM

HZ

“ The Zanolli Family send sincere condolences to you, John, Donna and your lovely family on the passing of brother Matthew. May he Rest In Peace and live on in your hearts with the fondest of memories.

Heather & Mike Zanolli - April 13, 2021 at 01:24 PM