

Know Me

NAME

Brian

PASSION

Movies

My Story

Brian Puntenney cannot recall a time when his mother and father were healthy. “Mom had a bad heart and breathing issues. Dad had Parkinson’s so bad that my mom could not care for him. Eventually, Dad had to be moved to a nursing home.” Despite his parent’s health issues, Brian, his mom, and two brothers remained a very close family, even once his brothers moved out and started families of their own. Brian graduated from Timken High School and later went on to the Cohen-Joliet and then Whipple-Dale Adult workshops.

It was in the summer of 2012 that Brian’s life changed forever. He was waiting for his bus and Tom Rieger, support specialist, struck up a conversation with him. The conversation was so simple, just a matter of hearing Brian’s story, but it was an instant connection. Brian told Tom he wanted to get out of the house more, but was unable to given his mother’s failing health. Brian and Tom worked it out that Tom would pick him up in the evening and go out to the movies. You see, Tom and Brian are both movie buffs. Brian actually has over 700 movies on DVD that he has collected over his 34 years of life.

The outings with Tom were so appreciated by Brian’s mother because she could see her son was changing. Brian was shy, rarely spoke, and was alone most of the time. When his brothers and their wives would visit, Brian would greet them from the basement, but rarely came up to see them.

Tom was Brian’s connection with the outside world. Brian’s mom continued to rely on Tom to do the things she could not do – get Brian out of the house and help him to have a life. She counted on Tom for being there for Brian.

Late in the summer of 2016 Brian’s mother spoke with Tom and related that she needed to go into the hospital. She asked



Tom if he could stay with Brian while she was gone. She was admitted to Aultman Hospital on September 19th, but never made it home. She passed away on September 21, 2016, at the age of 59.

At the funeral, Brian's family (his brothers, their wives, two nieces and a nephew) looked to Tom for where Brian could live. They were at a loss and lived out of the county. Tom said, "How about he continues to live with me?" Brian's family was awestruck at the offer and took him up on it. Brian lives with Tom to this day.

Brian has come out of his shell. He is talkative, funny, and has someone he relies on. Actually, they rely on each other. Tom says, "Brian has become the son I never had and I do not know what I would do without him. Brian gave his life a deeper sense of purpose and meaning." Tom shared a story about one time they were at the circus. Brian wanted to ride an elephant and Tom was apprehensive. Brian said, "Tom, you have got to stop being afraid of everything. You've got to take a chance." It was an "aha" moment for Tom.

On June 20, 2017, Brian's father passed away. Another sad moment in Brian's life, but he knew his dad had suffered long and was in no more pain. With a small inheritance from his father Brian used the money to buy a headstone for my mother's grave. "This expression shows Brian's heart and how deeply he cared for his mother and also shows the kind of man he is," said Tom.

Now, Brian runs the social calendar for him and Tom. Tom jokes, "I really would like to take his phone away because daily he is coming up with more and more things for us to do." They never miss a "First Friday" in downtown Canton, they catch movies galore, WWE wrestling, concerts that included Kid Rock, Justin Timberlake, Pentatonix, Maroon Five, Tim McGraw, and Cool and the Gang; just to name a few. On their upcoming agenda, they plan to see the Harlem Globetrotters and the band KISS – got to love the 80s.

Now when Brian's family visits, Brian is a different person. He shares with them all of what he has been doing and plans to do. Tom is now a part of their family as well. Brian and Tom just hosted Thanksgiving for Brian's brothers, their wives, and his nieces and nephews, and went to his brother's homes for Christmas and New Year's. These visits are no longer Brian yelling up from the basement a "Hello", but are visits filled with sitting around the table laughing, telling stories, and enjoying great food.

Two lives changed forever.



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