

Preamble

A LOT OF YOU have heard of Brian Doyle. For those who haven't I can tell you that he is a writer whose work has appeared in this magazine many times (exactly thirty, by my count). His stories are filled with children, wondrous animals, dirt, things that are weird to eat, walks on the beach, and misbehaving dogs. They are varied in length and theme, but have some common denominators: tremendous humor, tireless curiosity and wonder aimed at the planet's marvels, and a high-hearted love for his fellow humans and their interwoven lives.

Last November, Brian was diagnosed with what he himself designated as a "big honkin' brain tumor." More technically, the tumor is a glioblastoma, a description of which, on the internet, packs the words *malignant*, *aggressive*, and *incurable* into a single brutal sentence. Brian resigned from his job as editor of *Portland Magazine* the week after his diagnosis. He had brain surgery on November 23. He's been in further treatment ever since.

For the last couple of days, I've been wondering whether to write about Brian for this issue's Preamble. But there's a hidden irony there: Brian has often been my behind-the-scenes editor for these Preambles, and it's Brian himself to

whom I would have gone with my wondering. Brian has helped me turn the corner on many a piece, largely because of the harmony between Brian's nature and *Orion's* aims: both strive to combat despair with hope; both blend urgency with joy; both hold that reverence leads to inspiration, and inspiration to courage. Any number of times Brian has shown me how to reword something to make it sound more heartening, and he has also pulled me back from my own idealism when I've gone too far with it.

With Brian sick, I've had no one but myself to ask whether writing about him in his current condition is the right thing to do. And I don't much doubt that he'd be horrified by the idea. "For God's sake, Chip, the country is fecked up!" I imagine him saying. "Write about *that*, not some ailing writer! That's what needs addressing!"

Maybe. But everyone who reads this magazine knows a lot about how weird and dangerous our times have become. Yet no matter how unique and troubling the current moment may be, or how bizarrely things have shifted, some things never change. The innumerable things we deeply love remain loved. The crises we're striving to face, and to change, are colored with even greater urgency by a fresh

application of misdirection and lies, but remain essentially the same. Our country's long history of exploitation is being spun especially badly these days, but the greed driving the exploitation and spin-doctoring is no different than before. If history is a guide, and scientific and spiritual verities still have some standing in this country, we need imagination, courage, cooperation, truthfulness, and compassion to generate clarity and change, for it is in these values that a Brian word, *hopeitude*, is found.

As soon as I learned of Brian's cancer I sent him an email with an offer to help. He wrote right back: "You wanna help me? Be tender and laugh more."

A perfect Brian response—and I've kept thinking about it. Being tender and laughing more is not enough to repair what's broken. But what if we were audacious enough to believe that greater tenderness and more laughter could fix a lot? What if our response to hate, greed, and divisiveness were to be as kind as we can to each other and to every corner of the planet our hands, hearts, imaginations, actions, and hopeitude can touch? What if believing this as deeply as we can, and living it as deeply as we can, is the way toward our best and wildest dreams? ✎

—H. Emerson Blake