

# Coach, Mentor, Teacher and Friend

*by Tom Soboleski*

"He was one of our smartest people. He was one of those guys who shines," said Gerry, who sat next to Brian for the past several years. "He had a really good sense of humor, in addition to a good work ethic. When we had get-togethers as a group, the fun that Brian brought will never be experienced again; it just won't reach that level again."

Brian was diagnosed with cancer in November and fought bravely and optimistically to overcome it. He lost that seven-month battle on Tuesday morning at age 56. Brian leaves his wife, Chris, and daughters Amanda and Julia.

Brian was a human performance coach for the past several years, a job that requires a person to have long, practical experience in the trenches. It seemed to suit Brian to a tee; it was his calling.

Brian's diagnosis devastated his co-workers.

"He was such a wonderful teacher," said Arlene. "He had a real strength in the way he could explain things. He was very good at teaching, always so willing to share his knowledge. Every time I had a controls question, Brian would take out a little piece of paper and draw a schematic. He made things so clear."

Dan, who considered Brian one of his life mentors, took his 19-month old son, Benjamin, to visit Brian a few weeks ago. "Chris asked me to pray for a miracle," Dan said. "I told her that we already had been. As we were walking out to the car, I explained that I wanted Aaron to meet the guy we've been praying for at the end of every night since November as part of our bedtime ritual."

Dan said Brian gave Benjamin an old Ford model car kit. "He asked me to build it with him when he gets older and hoped it would be a bonding experience."

Brian came to work at Carbonfree as a controls technician in 1978. By 1982, he was a supervisor and in 1987 was promoted to manager of the Controls department. In 1996, he transferred to the Corrective Action department as a supervisor and for the past several years he worked in Organizational Effectiveness, specializing in human performance.

Alex worked with Brian in the Controls department. "Brian had a penchant for reindeer sweaters," he recalls, which he took good-natured ribbing about. Brian's ability to explain was evident early on, Alex said. "He was always willing to share. He'd always say, 'let me draw you a picture,' and it got to be part of a joke."

Larry recalled an incident at a softball game years ago, in which Brian was pitching and the batter hit a hard shot right back at him. "He tried to catch it with his bare hand, it came so fast. It split his fingers. When his wife showed up, we told her he was in the hospital and she thought we were joking." Fortunately, the injury didn't turn out too serious.

Brian was known as the 'Big Stick' on the softball diamond, said Tom, who also played with Brian.

"Brian was very dedicated to his family," said Gerry. "He and his wife Chris were true soul mates."

Arlene observed the same quality. "How highly he spoke of his wife and girls. After 30 years of marriage," she said, "he was still madly in love with his wife and really loved his family." In Brian's distinctive way of ensuring the special feeling never wore off, he'd excitedly tell Arlene that "Chris and I have a date tonight."

Brian made his mark, as well, rooting for Amanda in her middle school soccer games. "Amanda, played soccer with my daughter," said Tim. "Brian had a great grasp of the game and whenever a player was ball-handling and could take a shot, Brian would boom out, 'boot it!'" While the coaches instructed the players to tune out crowd noise, "Brian's 'boot it' seemed to always filter through to the players

and they reacted. Many good shots-on-goal resulted," said Tim. "Rest in peace, Brian."

Perhaps Brian had reached his true calling as someone who strove with commitment to help workers reduce their proneness to human error. "He had wisdom," said Phil. "He was a guy with a big heart and a lot of worldly experience. He was someone you could go to who would really listen and help you solve the problem. He was a tenacious problem solver. He wouldn't let go of a problem until he found a solution."

For Dan, coming to grips with the void Brian leaves is something he struggles with. "Knowing one of my life's mentors is not going to be around any more is indescribable. I've been thinking that the miracle we have received is the relationships we all have with each other are morphing into closer friendships. If that should be part of Brian's legacy, I think he would like that."

Phil had a chance to be a comforter and invaluable advisor to Brian throughout his battle, passing on the insight and experience from his own struggle with cancer. Unfortunately, the solution to cancer remains elusive, a reminder and a symbol of man's imperfection. A problem yet to be solved.

Brian's coworkers recognized that he shone with the most desirable characteristics of humanity: kindness, sharing, humility, coaching, teaching - always striving to help someone minimize their errors and realize their potential.

A celebration of Brian's life will be held on Saturday, from 1-3 p.m., in the backyard of his home at 4321 Sandy Lane. All co-workers and friends of Brian are welcome to attend and honor him.