

Our mother often said that of her four sons, Craig Napier Merkert was the bravest.

Our brother Craig died of natural causes on August 27, 2024.

Craig's struggles with mental illness began in early childhood and, while he became skilled in managing it, that illness never abated. While Craig's illness prevented him from having the easy, relaxed relationships that many of us enjoy with those we are close to, it gave his life a creative intensity that few of us will ever feel.

One example of that passionate engagement with life is a time that he and one of his brothers hiked up St. Mary's Glacier and skied down it. At the bottom edge of the glacier was a lake filled with water so cold that it had ice floating in it. After finishing their run, Craig said to his brother, "Let's go for a swim." His brother, confident that Craig was joking, said, "I will if you will." In 30 seconds Craig had kicked off his skis and boots, undressed down to his underwear and waded into the 33-degree water up to his neck. It took his astonished brother about 20 minutes to find the gumption to make good on his promise to follow Craig into the frigid water.

In adolescence Craig became an expert in the history of the Civil War. He could recount the troop strengths of opposing armies in many battles, the military advantages that each side held over the other and the character strengths and flaws of the generals leading each side.

Craig often dressed in clothing that reflected his interest in Civil War history and, sometimes, his interest in the Victorian era. Once he accompanied his mother, who was serving as a docent, at an open house decorated as if it was the home of a prosperous Victorian family ready for Christmas. As visitors toured the house they'd come upon a mannequin of a tall, gray bearded Victorian gentleman dressed to the nines. When the guests got close to it, the mannequin would suddenly come to life -- startling the guests in a delightful way -- and reveal itself to be our brother Craig.

Our mother maintained that Craig was braver than any of her other sons because of the disturbing and uncontrollable thoughts that Craig had to face every day. Craig called these uncontrollable thoughts "spiritual warfare". He described spiritual warfare as an unending battle between demons warring with angels in his imagination. He spoke of spiritual warfare infrequently but when he did, he shuddered.

Instead of ending his life, as many have done when faced with unremitting psychological torment every day of their lives, Craig found ways to act on the compassion he had for those he saw as less fortunate. Craig often described himself as a dove whose job it was to help others to find peace within themselves.

Craig's compassion took the form of sharing his apartments with those who couldn't afford a home of their own, sharing food and clothing with those who needed it, and acting as a chauffeur for those without transportation. Most importantly, he served as a friend and confidant for others, and there were many, whose troubled lives intersected with his.

Craig had a well-worn portfolio of "jokes", riddles really, which gave some pleasure to those he told them to and, for sure, gave him a LOT of pleasure in the telling.

In lieu of flowers please donate to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](https://www.nami.org). [NAMI.org](https://www.nami.org)