

(written on 8/12/2026 during a period of the unknown)

I'm Byron's twin.

I'm a physician.

I need things to make sense in order for me to function.

I share this narrative because I blamed myself for his death. That I didn't call enough. That I didn't advise him well. That I didn't catch the clues. Others reassure me that it's not my fault (I can see that now) but I compiled this narrative to help me process. (He died the morning of 8/7/2026)

If you are choosing to read this, you're acknowledging that I was not Byron's treating doctor. That no specific person is to blame (nope, not even Byron) and that by learning what went wrong, we can help save hundreds if not thousands of other lives. By reading this, you are also acknowledging that it's my best guess: the autopsy report will come out when it comes out and that in the meantime, we still have the heavy and hard job of grieving. If you're out for vengeance and blood, lawsuit and liability, stop now because this ain't for you. If you want to celebrate Byron's awesomeness and how badass his personality was and the legacy he leaves, then read on.

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I believe that Byron died from a pulmonary embolism (PE) broken off from a deep venous thrombosis (DVT) in his right leg.

In a series of incredibly unfortunate events, there were stand-alone issues on their own that would have likely resolved but for Byron, they aligned in such a way that it ended his life. He did not suffer.

Some general medical background:

"Coagulopathy" is a fancy doctor word for blood clot. Our blood is really amazing. It carries oxygen and nutrients throughout our body in well constructed tubes that automatically release chemicals to keep our blood thin and liquid. If we ever have injury to the tubes (veins/arteries) then it can disrupt the chemicals that thin our blood. Sometimes we have to give outside chemicals to thin our blood (literally called blood thinners) for certain cases. Once a clot has formed, it's REALLY hard to clear the clot with medicines. Most times you need to go in with a surgeon who can remove it by hand/machine. If you try and clear the clot

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with by hand/machine and don't do it delicately, it can cause the clot to break, sending smaller clots all over the place. A small clot in your brain is called a stroke. A middle clot to your heart is called a heart attack. A big clot to your lungs is called a pulmonary embolus. Each of those clots means blood isn't flowing to a really important organ: brain, heart, lungs. All of them can be deadly.

For Byron, two things happened to increase the risk of coagulopathy/blood clotting: COVID and knee surgery.

COVID is a virus that literally causes blood clotting. When it first began to show up, we thought it was just a respiratory disease. But it was causing mini strokes/brain fog, heart attacks, stomach pain, heart failure. How? Because the "spike protein" on it triggers our blood system to start clotting when it's not supposed to. Byron recovered from this after being in the hospital, he took his heart meds as directed, did his rehab, and eventually came off all medications. This was way back in 2020/2021 but what I've learned is that the effects of COVID can linger.

Surgery is incredible. Trained men and women can go in and with skill and talent, move structures around (sometimes adding things, sometimes taking things out) to help improve function for that person. When Byron had his reconstruction surgery for his patellar tendon rupture, he said the surgeon commented that "it looked like a bomb went off in there." After rehab, Byron continued to have both pain and ongoing swelling everyday. Why is this important? **Remember: "injury to the tubes (veins/arteries)" can create slower draining (increasing risk of clotting) and disrupt the chemicals that thin our blood.**

Byron's solution was reasonable: wear a brace, put his feet up. Massage his leg. Keep on moving. Again, by itself, not bad. But the arteries and veins of the knee are particularly tricky; if you've ever gotten a massage, you'll notice that massage therapists NEVER massage the "armpit of your knee" because the veins and arteries there can have traffic jams (clots and blockages) that can break off and float.

The plane ride that I think changed everything.

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Planes are not built for big people. In fact, it's one of the reasons why I break the bank to buy seats with more legroom: they are uncomfortable (I'm 6'2"). I don't know what seat Byron bought but I'm almost 100% sure that it was tight because he's 6'5". Add in the fact that most people still recline their seats and it means that his injured leg was likely at a 90 degree angle, immobile for 2 to 3 hours. Most of us don't think to take an aspirin. We don't think to wear support hose. We don't think to get up and walk around (remember: when you move, your body makes more of its own blood thinner to prevent clots.) My guess is during that flight, the **DVT "seeds"** of Byron's demise were planted from that 90 degree angle, **of no one's fault**.

The joy of the all-inclusive resort

I love Cancun's vacation culture so much that I've been there 3 or 4 times. It's so nice to be pampered. And that's what Byron, KK, and their friends got to do as they celebrated a wedding. Alcohol is great at lowering people's inhibitions but it dehydrates us. If you've ever heard of "breaking the dam" when you drink and then you pee a lot, it's because alcohol blocks the kidney hormone that holds back making pee. If you block the blocker, you promote peeing. When you pee a lot, you get dehydrated and dehydration makes clotting more likely/worse. The treatment: Drink less alcohol and more water. For Byron, he had a great time and got sunburned (which also dehydrates you because water evaporates from your skin faster.) I dreamt of taking him and his entire family on their first family all-inclusive. **His drinking and dehydration did not cause his death.** But it likely worsened the DVT that was already there, sitting silently, possibly throwing off little clots already.

Coming back

The return flight likely did no favors because again, his leg is sitting at a 90 degree angle and the forces of blood going around the likely clot that was there slowly increased its size. Remember, blood clots are sticky and any amount of clumping just makes it all worse. Think of a garden hose. When it's straight and the water is on, you don't really feel the flow. But kink it at a 90 degree angle and you hear that noise; if that noise had a physical form, it would be like a blood clot.

Three weeks of head-scratching and appropriate support

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The 3 weeks back from his trip will forever haunt every family member and friend of Byron because each of us knew a small piece of the story, none quite making sense to any particular one of us at any moment. The throughline was the sense of urgency: while worrisome, none of the symptoms pinged any of us to say “go to the ER.” All of us encouraged him to “ask someone” about his random ass symptoms, which Byron, thankfully, did. When we mentioned “go to the doctor” Byron responded repeatedly with “I don’t have insurance.” I did explain to Byron how we could get him into a doctor we could pay directly but again, his sense of urgency didn’t override his worry about insurance/finances. ***I think over these 3 weeks, there was likely some clot near his lungs and heart that might have been positional.*** When upright and walking, it didn’t cause symptoms so everyone (including him) thought he was fine. When laying flat or walking stairs, it moved causing him off-and-on discomfort and symptoms of shortness of breath. Sometimes it would cause arrhythmias (racing heart rates) and then resolve. Being in the health industry, I will relive these 3 weeks for the rest of my life because I didn’t see the hidden pattern in the “randomness” of his symptoms.

The evening before

KK said that the night before his death, he was happy, smiling, active, and optimistic. No distress and that he was excited about his new job. They went to bed.

The moment

When Byron woke up not feeling well in the middle of the night, I think it was because some clot already near his lungs shifted. Your brain reacts when oxygen falls and that’s what woke him up. I think when he swung his legs over the bed and stood up, it broke more clot from his leg and when it combined with clot near his lungs while he stood in the kitchen, it overwhelmed his system.

TAKE A DEEP BREATH.

AND ANOTHER.

GO FOR A WALK

YELL IF YOU CAN AND CRY AS YOU NEED TO

Who’s To Blame?

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No specific person.

Not Byron: Yes, he lived life to the fullest. To his credit, he pushed through poverty, self-doubt, test anxiety, and any obstacle in his way. He asked questions when he had them. Did he always listen? No. But he didn't see the silent killer lurking in that leg until it was too late.

Not Family: Yes, we could have pushed him harder to get care. Yes we could have strong-armed him and threatened him to do things. But he's grown and we love him, quirks and stubbornness and all. No one saw the silent killer lurking in that leg.

Not Friends: Yes, we could have not taken that tequila shot with him. Yes, we knew he only liked to eat meat and not veggies. But we're all grown and take on the responsibility of trusting our loved ones (like Byron) to decide what they want out of this life. None of us saw the silent killer lurking in that leg.

Not Trips of a Lifetime: Yes, he could have stayed home and missed his friend's wedding in Cancun. But that's not Byron. He wanted to celebrate and it was his first time at an all-inclusive. I'm super glad he got to go and enjoy himself. His friends and he had a terrific time and memories that everyone will cherish for a lifetime. No one would have thought about the silent killer lurking in that leg.

Not the Fouling Dude: The guy who clipped Byron leading to his patellar tendon rupture might have been an asshole. Maybe he did it intentionally. But he didn't foresee this happening nor did Byron. And both were doing what they loved: playing basketball. No one could have foreseen that a knee repair would have been the breeding ground for the silent killer lurking in that leg.

Who's actually to blame?

Systemic failure means a failure of all system failsafes. These were epic.

Airlines: Yes, they have slowly and surely, over time, decreased the legroom on flights. For people taller than 6'2" getting an economy seat is super uncomfortable and can increase the risk of DVTs for those folks. And they really

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should get rid of reclining seats if they are going to have decreased legroom for tall people. For tall people, they shouldn't charge extra for the extra legroom seats...they are assholes.

Health Finance System: When we get the right patient in front of the right doctor, magic happens. But money gets in the way. Health insurers have created the fallacy/illusion that the only way to get that patient to that doctor is through insurance. This is a lie. A deadly lie. And I will make them pay for this.

Science community: COVID is deadly, still. And it's going to wreak havoc on our world until we take it seriously. Long COVID is still not well understood and considering that so many of us have had it, we need more education about what it's doing to our bodies. "Dopaminergic neuronal senescence" is real and causes us to forget just how deadly this virus is.

Wanna Help?

- Advocate for tall people rights on planes
- Encourage planes to teach more about DVTs
- Make health pricing transparent: this will be my laser focus for the rest of my life
- Help men be more consistent in getting care

What to do with all this grief?

WWBD: What would Byron do?

He'd take that vacation.

He'd go up for that layup.

He'd take the tequila shot.

He'd include the social outcast.

He'd call out racism.

He'd support his friends even when they do stupid shit.

He'd eat that barbecued meat and skip the vegetables.

He'd cry then help the person next to him feel better.

My guess can be wrong; that's why I'm not Byron's doctor or his medical examiner. If they come back with the diagnosis of heart attack (left side of the

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heart) rather than pulmonary embolism (right side of the heart), I'd still blame some connection to the DVT/cascade because again, he was healthy and we don't have a family history of heart disease that would cause something this catastrophic this fast.

In building this narrative to help me grieve, I stopped asking questions. I did not quiz KK on how much Byron stood up on the plane. If the person in front of him reclined their seat. If he took aspirin or wore support hose. If he got a massage at the resort from an inexperienced masseuse who manipulated his popliteal fossa (knee armpit). If he crossed his legs. If he, if he, if he. Why didn't I do this? **Because in the end, it doesn't matter and would only serve to spiral me deeper in grief.** Blood clots are silent until they aren't. And nothing we can do will find them unless they want to be found. Sometimes events line up and cause awful outcomes. I'm gonna be sad for a really really long time.

I don't know how I'll get through this. But Byron told me in a video while we sat in IHOP celebrating Daddy and giving him his flowers **"be calm, cool, and collected about everything; don't let nothing bother you, keep a smile on your face."** So that's what I'll do while I move through these early moments without my twin.

Brian Jamel Dixon, MD

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