

May 27, 2008 "A Celebration of the Life of Joe Rieger: by Bill Hawes

Due to the fact that I am almost 13 years younger than Joe, I did not really know him very well until he returned from the Navy and started going to college. Before that all I'll I really remember about Joe was his love for melodrama and his sense of humor. Most of our home videos with Joe as a young boy prove this point. He pretty much demanded the spot-light, even to the point of shoving his siblings out of the way of the camera.

When given military leave, he would always work out elaborate schemes to add to the hype of his return. He would walk through the door, unannounced like a conquering war hero. My mother would just about explode with excitement, and Joe just ate up the attention. In fact, this is when he earned the highly esteemed position of "my son, my son."

After the Navy, Joe went off to college at UConn and lived on campus. His visits home, as well as his trip returning to school, would still ooze of melodrama. Yet, through all these years, Joe still taught us what it means to apply one's self, do things well and complete them.

Then Karen entered the scene, a beautiful red head with a zeal for life matched by few. That zeal for life was one of her many great gifts to my brother, and to our family. It was really this union that made me realize we were going to witness something special. We began to see Joe develop into the great man we are honoring today.

Joe and Karen showed us all what dedicated love looks like. Their commitment to each other was beautiful to watch, as they went through life's ups and downs.

Joe and Karen even showed us how to fight. You have to imagine that two people with such strong personalities would have to, have it out sometimes. But even then, they would argue only about the issue at hand. They never attacked each other. This is a valuable lesson we all need to master. They got their points across, kissed, and moved on like nothing happened. My family would watch with amazement each time we witnessed it.

Joe was a great example of how to love children. He was involved in every aspect of parenthood. He was the first man I'd ever scene change a diaper or feed a baby with a bottle. He was patient and gentle. Again, our family watched in amazement as Joe took to being a dad. After all, he was a body building, mafia gangster wanna-be, that loved to read books about conquering war heroes of the past. Yet there he was, making formula bottles, changing diapers and doing his best to tend to his family's every need.

Joe was a go-getter. He would tackle each obstruction to his goals with tenacity. His determination and his unwillingness to compromise himself won him great respect among his colleagues in the business world, but more importantly with his whole family. Joe showed us that the "nay-sayers" and the fearful shadows would either fall away or just disappear if you would just muster up the courage to face them. It was Joe and Karen that gave my wife Christine and I the final dose of courage to pick up and move our family from CT to begin a new life in Florida. Joe was a great example of what it means to live a life of faith. It was the way that Joe worked at his faith that will always inspire me. It was like his faith shaped him and he shaped his faith. All that Joe was before he became a believer joined forces with his love for God. It ignited something really unique about Joe. He worked at his faith by studying and memorizing scripture early in the morning, before the circumstances of the day had the chance to set the direction of the day. He was courageous. How many people would chose to, jump the tried and true tracks of their lives, and chose to completely alter the direction of their lives? Joe

did, with the help of Karen, his family, and many of those here! From it was born a ministry that brought laughter and reflection to many of us in this room. He was dedicated to the service of his family and to his church family. The best thing is, he loved doing it. Life was not an obligation for him. Instead it was a passion. We've all seen that same love being reciprocated back to his family these past few years and especially these past few weeks. Thank you church family. You are my church family too.

I did not often call Joe for verbal advice or counsel. Sometimes I regret that. However, Joe's example was so bright; it was a beacon that could be followed without words. He truly lived a life of Faith, Hope, Love and Laughter. I could not have come up with a better name to describe what Joe is to his family and friends. Joann Perry, one of Joe's Angels, put a picture frame in his hospital room with four square panes. They read: Faith, Hope, Love and Family. That was Joe. Thank you Joann, I'm sure it blessed Joey as it blessed me.

The word Christian means "Christ-like." Joe was a true Christian. His example will inspire so many of us for the rest our days. Although his time here was cut short, the time he gave us was "quality" time. They can be counted as double years because he lived life to its fullest. That is how I am being comforted in this time. It is easy for me as a believer, to look at my past and see God's hand, His provision and His faithfulness. I struggle with God's decision to bring Joe home so early but I know we will be able to look back at this time and still see that God is with us and that He is good. As for now, it helps to know that Joe is with his Savior, probably on stage like Jerry Seinfeld making those who have gone before us laugh with the sense of humor that was the essence of Joseph Anthony Rieger.

-Bill Hawes, Joe's brother