

May 27, 2008

“A Celebration of the Life of Joe Rieger” by Bob Rieger

Introduction:

Good Morning, for those who don't know me, I'm Joe's younger brother Bob, (and yes, I think it was mentioned about 1,000 times yesterday that I look like Joe!). As you can see from the “Funny” Slide show - Joe got most of the creative talent and outrageous sense of humor in the family. As for me – well, I got this T-Shirt... (Hold up the Joey's Angels T-Shirt)

But seriously, on behalf of all my family, I want to express my heartfelt “thanks” to all the Valley Brook Church family for their love and support throughout Joe's battle against cancer and during this most difficult time. (especially Melissa, Lisa, and Diane – thank you and we love you)

Talk about a Legacy? How about yesterday's outpouring of love and tribute paid to Joe's life and his family yesterday – estimates range from 650 to 1,000 people!

Some Key dates during Joe's Life:

- He was born 10-20-1958.
- Graduated from Milford High School in 1976.
- Joined the US Navy right after High School until 1980.
- Married the beautiful Karen Beth Champagne on 12-06-1986.
- Has 3 wonderful children: Michael (18), born in 05-24-1990, Becky (16), born in 11-26-1991, and Lauren (13) born in 07-14-1994.
- In 1994, earned his MBA from The University of New Haven.
- When did Joe become a Christian? Well, Joe believed in Jesus his whole life, but started to develop a more personal relationship in late 1995 (Shortly after reading the book “The Late Great Planet Earth” and also listening to Norm Nelson on the radio).
- In 2004 - Joe left the Corporate Business World because he heard God's calling to start “Faith, Hope, Love, and Laughter”, (a.k.a. FHLL).
- On May 23, 2006 – Joe had a cancerous colorectal tumor removed and began his courageous fight to overcome this dreaded disease.
- On 05-22-2008 – Joe “passes on” to Heaven to be with his Savior and best friend, Jesus.

If I could “just crack the door open into my heart – I'd like to share with you my Thoughts / Memories of “Joe Rieger's Legacy” (others too will share their memories):

Joe Invested heavily in personal relationships.

He was a great son, an awesome brother, a faithful husband, a dedicated and devoted father, a caring friend, and most importantly a genuine and mature Christian. People mattered to Joe, because they mattered to God.

His hopes/dreams/personality/gifts were “larger than life” ! (Who else would sing to their coffee cup “Big White” AND record it on video tape – (Big Guy, Big Cup,... No ordinary Guy, No ordinary Cup).

Some of Joe’s Gifts:

From birth he was THE Drama “King” – he loved to create skits, write songs, play act, sing music spoofs, and of course storytelling – and- they were always Laugh-Out-Loud funny:

- One Example was when Joey (as a kid) sang “Pavarotti Like” opera on the roof of Grandma Faye’s porch.
- Or who could forget the Neighborhood wide Home-made 8 mm Movie Productions of The Great Bank Robbery and Count Dracula.
- One more example – Once - when on Military Navy leave – Joe wouldn’t call home for a ride, but would purposely walk home from the Local Holiday Inn in full Naval uniform with a huge duffle bag on his back – this was to make a dramatic home coming entrance - as if returning home from WWII. (He loved WWII - and in fact - he took several Navel photos in Black and White to pretend that the photos were from WWII.)

Joe was Quick Witted:

For example, one day he didn’t want me to hang out with he and his older friends so he invented “Gua-day” where on every Tuesday night at 2 AM - you would enter into a “magical world” – crossing all space and time – where you could play games and eat all kinds of junk food – and then return to your bed the next morning - but you wouldn’t be tired! However, you had to be 12 years old or older to go to Gua-day (I was 11 – some coincidence huh?)

Joe was Laugh Out Loud Crazy:

- For example, one time in the early 1970’s, our family was driving home from the Milford Mall in August (and it was about 95 degrees out) – and JOEY made us all roll-up our windows in my Mom’s Cutlass Supreme to pretend to the world that we could afford A/C – a luxury back then. (I think I still have scars on the back of my legs from the vinyl seats!).
- Halloween Outfits (you’ll see from slide shows)

Work Ethic:

Throughout his life, Joe demonstrated a tireless Work Ethic and yet when it was time to “play”, he knew how to have fun with the best of them.

Joey was well educated and an avid reader.

And lastly, He cared deeply about history, politics, world events, and financial matters. In my opinion, he surely had the talent and drive to become rich and famous, but as he grew

closer to God, he heard a higher calling to serve the Lord, to build relationships, and worked to "Live in the Smile of the Father". You see, this Ministry was no accident or fluke idea - All, (and I repeat all), of his God given gifts and past experiences, (both good and bad), uniquely prepared him for this ministry – a ministry this world so deeply needs! Think about it... without God and NO FAITH, HOPE, LOVE, or LAUGHTER – what is there to live for?

AND if this weren't enough, he included his entire family into this ministry, working together on the Music Worship Team, Vacation Bible School, creating/acting dramas and comedy skits, retreats, Puppet shows, and Webcasts. Something this beautiful and fulfilling - only God could craft! We need to continue this type of ministry – maybe with a Joe Rieger Foundation – more to come...

So, a great life's story to this point. "So *why colorectal cancer now God?*" I don't know – but it will be the first question on my list (as is Joe's) when I get to heaven, (and I will be taking my list!)

I pray for all who knew Joey NOT TO BE BITTER! (Joe wasn't bitter). Joe never once blamed God or felt sorry for himself. (He did try to understand how God could use him in the midst of this battle and he prayed for healing). In fact, he was always comforting OTHERS - not himself! He even kidded about his cancer during a Sermon. "Quasi Quote" from Joe: "You know, I took pretty good care of myself (proper diet and exercise, no drugs) so, what the heck did I eat? I know at U-Conn – I ate some bugs and even some "ram's hooves" but that couldn't have caused this - could it God?"

In fact, very much like the Apostle Paul – whose "physical thorn" or weakness actually increased his ministry for Jesus....Joe's ministry intensified and hundreds, if not thousands of lives, were touched by his faith, great courage, integrity, and humility during this 2 year battle. As an example, here's an excerpt for Joe's Health Update from 05-06-2008: "God is working in me and through me and lives are being touched and supernaturally transformed. In all sincerity, I love Jesus now more than ever. We've never been closer - and it's so reassuring to know with absolute certainty - I will be with Him in paradise one day. This may come sooner than I had originally intended, but He's God and knows what's best all around. Here are a few Bible verses that are helping me to get through these "final" and most critical stages of this battle:

²Corinthians 12:9 (New International Version) ⁹But he (Jesus to speaking to Paul) said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Psalms 73:23-24 (New International Version)

²³ Yet I am always with You;

You hold me by my right hand.

²⁴ You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward You will take me into glory.

Does Joe sound bitter or feel sorry for himself? No way. Eventually though on May 22nd, the cancer took his body... but Jesus has his soul Joe is in Heaven!!

In Conclusion:

I've just shared with you some personal reflections on Joe's LEGACY. If I may, some thoughts and heartfelt advice from a grieving brother. Here's a quote from a Christian song writer's goal to leave a lasting legacy much like Joe's (and it's now my goal):

*"I want to leave a legacy How will they remember me?
Did I choose to Love?
Did I point to you enough?
To make a mark on things I want to leave an offering
A child of mercy and grace
Who blessed Your name – unapologetically And leave that kind of Legacy"*

Life is precious – please don't take it for granted.
Take time out today to thank God for being alive and "relatively" healthy.
Tell your family how much you love them and hug them just a little bit tighter and a little bit longer than usual.
Life is a gift from God. Live life to the fullest like Joe did – he accomplished more in his 49 years than most will achieve if given 100 years!

Joe led by example on Earth. He pointed to Jesus and made us laugh along the way; you see, religion doesn't have to hurt and now Joe's reward is in Heaven...

To my big brother Joey:

Another "Mocked up Quasi Quote" from Nichole Nordeman from the song "I AM": A Prayer to God our Father...

*When life had begun, Joe was woven and spun
God let the angels dance around His throne
And who can say when (May 22nd), but they danced again
Now that Joe is FREE and finally headed HOME
He was weak, unable to speak but still, Joe called God by name...*

*Creator, Maker, Life Sustainer Comforter, Healer, my Redeemer Lord and King,
Beginning and the End I AM Yes, I AM
– Amen and praise be to God!*

To Joey - I'm sure Jesus greeted you in heaven with a warm embrace and said "Well done my good and faithful servant, with you, I am well pleased."

"We'll see you in heaven – big brother- I love you..."