

**George Roberts: *Celebration of Life***

5.11.13

First, **George's obituary**, from Leslie: the Roberts' family wordsmith:

George D. Roberts, a lover of life, a visionary, a philosopher and a good friend to many, died unexpectedly in his home Monday, May 6, 2013. He was 62. He was born on Dec. 20, 1950, in Newport, R.I., to the late George Roberts Sr. and Rosemary (Harkins-Johnson). In 1972, George married his wife, Suzanne (Owsley) Roberts. She survives.

George lived in the moment and led by example. He took every opportunity to recognize the beauty in life, the potential greatness of a situation and the individual uniqueness in all people. One of his biggest philosophies was that it is "important to continue to grow" ... and he never stopped growing, fueled by an incredible curiosity for learning new things.

There was not a sport at which George didn't excel, but he is known as an avid cyclist (Breakaway Bicycle Club) and a great basketball player. He loved long walks, telling a good story or joke, reading biographies, lively political debates, taking naps in the sun, the outdoors, camping, photography, music, talking with people and spending time with his family.

He approached every activity as a challenge for fun and achievement. He loved chess and Ping-Pong matches, was a voracious reader and loved traveling.

Two of his favorite quotes were, "There is no finish line," and "carpe diem." Words he lived by.

He is survived by his wife, Suzanne Roberts, Kokomo; three children, Aimee (Anush) Roberts-Mahalingam, Pasadena, Calif., Lesley Roberts, Los Angeles, Calif., and Eli Roberts, Bangkok, Thailand; three sisters, Diann Roberts, Kokomo, Rose Costa, Kokomo, and Donna Roberts, Kokomo; four brothers, Paul Roberts, Connecticut, John J. (Mary-Honey) Roberts, Kokomo, Mark (Susan) Roberts, Lafayette, and Brian (Donna) Roberts, Philadelphia; several very special nieces and nephews; and numerous special friends.

George was preceded in death by his parents; sister-in-law, Terri Roberts; and brother-in-law, Dewayne Owsley.

(PRAY )

Before I'd met George, my wife Sandra & Suzanne had already become fast-friends. They met (of all places) at Aldi. So it's true when I say we've gotten both--the most inexpensive *and* priceless things in our life at Aldi ;-)

I'll never forget **the night I met George**: Sandra and I are pulling out of Family Video when Sandra says, "Hey stop--there's George and Suzanne!"

I cannot tell you verbatim what he said, but I can assure you that this 6' 3" hulk of a man leaned low into my Accord's window and drew almost uncomfortably close to my face...and ridiculously-sincerely and assuredly let me know what an honor it was to meet me and I'm sure a host of other pleasantries that seemed overwhelming for a first-meeting.

I most likely responded with words and a demeanor that were technically polite.

As we backed out and I rolled up my window smiling at this new acquaintance. I then turned to Sandra and said with shades of unbelieving sarcasm, "*Is that dude for real?*"

Translation: No one is *that* kind, *that* honoring, and *that* engaging at a first handshake. Having never met me, based *only* on my relationship with Sandra, he made me feel like he was meeting "somebody"--even though we'd just met, he made me feel important.

I, like you, realized very quickly that this guy was "for real." And from that day forward, George Roberts became one of the closest and most prized friends to me and our family.

(SELAH)

Three words have come to mind this week: "larger than life." At 6' 3" he was always one of the largest men in the room. And his demeanor--his extreme kindness, care and grace were larger than life--that's why I said, "Is that guy for real?" Because his presence and authenticity were so much larger than the norm.

It's hard to convey how difficult it's been to find the words to frame George's life. In so many ways, he was larger than life, from his physical chiseled stature to his wide array of interests. But I think I have found two words that get us close. "Larger than life" is good, but I think I have two more that are even more apt:

### ***Renaissance Man.***

(what does that mean?)

In the 1400s Leon Battista Alberti defined Renaissance Man like this (see if this sounds like George):

- 1) A Renaissance Man believes he is empowered and limitless in his capacity for development.
- 2.) He believes that he should embrace all knowledge and develop his capacities as fully as possible.
- 3) And people considered Renaissance Men sought to develop skills in the area of knowledge, in physical development, in social accomplishment and in appreciation of the arts.

That was George Roberts--that's what a Renaissance Man looks like. A life in tune with and valuing the intellectual, the physical, the social and the arts.

George Roberts was a Renaissance Man!

(Aside to the family)

Before I go any further, I just want to say how honored I am to serve you today. I am profoundly honored to have been counted among his friends. And I pray my words today will help--will serve--but I know they will ultimately be inadequate compared to the volume of life this great man lived. Thank you for allowing me to be part of this.

(SELAH)

Clearly the thing that most marked George's life, was love...**the love of his life, Suzanne.** It's almost as if his name was "George And." Because it was always, "George and Suzanne."

Suzanne was the love of his life for nearly the whole of his life!  
They dated at the then, "new" Taylor High School (part of 1st graduating class.)  
Somehow they survived all the drama of high school and George's time in the army to be happily married in August of 1972.

Can we just stop here for moment...for nearly 41 years, a one-woman man and a one-man woman. AND they still loved each other. LIKED each other...

Spent time together,  
Took trips together,  
Set out in the back yard together,  
Took walks together,  
Road bikes together,  
Lived & loved together.

George took care of Suzanne. (Not because she's frail--can't take of herself)--took care of her in the way a gentleman treats a woman--the details that are so often lost in our culture. George: the consummate gentleman.

How many times did I see him:

Open a car door.

Help her with her coat on.

Ladies first.

He served Suzanne. His servanthood toward her, fueled by his infinite supply of love for her.

On Tuesday Suzanne and I were sitting out on their front porch and she told me some of the most crazy in-love details I've ever heard. She said,

"His sweat even smells good." ;-)

"I even like the smell of his socks." ;-)

George loved Suzanne. What a legacy. What a model. What a gift to each other. What a gift to their children.

George loved Suzanne. Suzanne loves George.

Since high school, George *and* Suzanne.

(SELAH)

And George's life was profoundly marked by **his love of his children**.

He loved his family so deeply.

(to kids) He was so proud of each of you.

He enjoyed how unique each of you are: Aimee, Leslie, Eli.

He was so proud of who you grew up to become.

He was always rooting for you.

Always excited to hear from you.

Always looked forward to visiting with you.

Always missed you.

Each of you in your own unique way made your father's eyes light up and sparkle more than anyone else could. And when he spoke of you we often saw even more of his toothy smile.

And Anush, George was so glad that you came along and could love Aimee in such a way that makes a father's heart relax.

I asked Suzanne if there was anything that George had left unsaid to you, Aimee, Leslie & Eli--anything he didn't get around to saying. She said a quick no. She said, "He said everything to his kids that he needed to say--he never held back anything."

George loved his children and told them and showed them often. That is a gift. That is a legacy.

And we have to mention how wonderful all of his nieces and nephews were to Uncle George. No offense to other family members around here, but clearly George was "the Cool Uncle." ;- ) And LOVED and enjoyed all of his nieces and nephews.

(SELAH)

It goes without saying how gentle, loving, considerate, respectful and kind George was to all kinds of people. But to a lot of us men, one of the things we loved about George was that **he was a Man's Man**.

And that meant everything from riding the Hilly Hundred bicycle race in Brown Co, to simpler things--like a couple years ago...

He was over at our house and my son Slater, then in middle school, and I were out shooting hoops in our driveway. (Rim little lower than regulation.)

And we tossed the ball to ol George and the next thing you know he's "Air George" and SLAMS that ball through the hoop--several times.

And little Slater's eyes were wide open, and he's grinning from ear to ear because nobody had slammed dunked on that goal before with that kind of authority---and you just knew that was the coolest thing that Slater saw all week ;- )

But allow me to share my favorite (dare I say "little known") Man's Man story.

(HAMMER STORY) ("What did you do?! "I took it away.")

A Renaissance Man has the capacity for détente and grace... but also knows when it's time to forcefully take a hammer away from an idiot in a pickup truck. THAT'S a Renaissance Man! ;- )

(SELAH)

**George was generous.** You'd see it in the way he interacted with people on the street in California. Or there was the time our water heater went out.

George has always been like a big brother to me, so he often helped me navigate the trials of home ownership.

We'd had a full day of removing my ancient behemoth of a water heater. And we tracked down the ONE water heater in town that would fit this situation. We're at his favorite plumbing shop: Kings.

The end is in sight, we just need to get this home. They put the bill in front of me and I lay down my credit card. Man across the counter says:

*"Sorry sir, we don't take that particular card."*

Before I can have my meltdown moment, George throws down *his* card that they will take.

And before I can say anything, he waves his hands and whispers, "Later, you can take care of it later."

(SELAH)

### **Can we talk about his character for a minute?**

If George said it, he meant it.

If he said it, he did it.

He was the original "my word is my bond" guy. Who better to speak about is character than Suzanne--the person who saw more of him than anyone else.

She said to me this week,

*"He was a man of impeccable integrity.* He was so fair-minded with people. He didn't just talk the talk, he walked the walked."

And she added somewhat forcefully & proudly,

*"And I know--I lived with him--he never cheated or took advantage. His integrity was impeccable!"*

(SELAH)

**George was a learner & a listener.**

And so much of his learning came through listening.

And so much of his listening came through a belief that everyone has value.

Everyone he'd encountered had the potential to share an idea or a perspective that he'd not considered.

As much as I respected George for how much wisdom and knowledge he possessed, I am perhaps more in awe of his appetite to grow further in knowledge and wisdom. He simply was always striving to get better.

And if you offered up a nugget of something he hadn't heard before, how did he respond? He often *leaned in*. His eyes *opened wider*. And he said, "*Is that right?*"

Or if he was starting to grab onto your new idea--entertaining what you'd offered--he just might look serious, nod slightly and say,

*"I hear you. I hear what you're saying."*

I love how every day, George was a student of life and human interaction, as he traveled the road to be better today, than he was yesterday.

(SELAH)

I love how George was **not defined by where he came from or where he lived**.

In other words, George came from a blue collar family and grew up in blue collar city. In that environment, it's so easy to live a life of status quo. A life of doing what everyone else does.

George worked at and retired from Chrysler. But he took his earnings and created a life for his family and him that was defined by:

personal growth,  
concern for the planet,  
compassion for the community,  
and a belief that he and his family could live lives that were both,  
for their own good AND the greater good.

In a city where so many people are concerned about what happens on their little homestead, George was concerned about the global and local environment. Concerned about city beautification and the arts, bike trails and adding to our city so that everyone could enjoy a healthier way of living.

(SELAH)

I love how **George was a walking dichotomy**. He was:

Gentle yet strong.

Great listener but had strong opinions.

Loved being in a roomful of people yet spent time alone.

Loved people yet hated injustice.

Political yet not divisive

Was patient with those who didn't know any better yet didn't tolerate disrespect.

And add to that palette--a wise discernment for knowing WHEN to be gentle & when to be strong.

Knew when and with whom to "crack wise" bout politics and when to hold his cards.

Knew there were times to be with people and times to pull back to create some solitude

In a world where so many of us take pride in being single-minded--in a world where we proudly channel our inner Popeye saying, "I am what I am!"

George seemed to live a more discerning, more balanced, more open minded, less stressed life of "all things in moderation" or yin & yang, if you will.

(SELAH)

Can we talk about **the shock of this** for a minute?

I'm guessing every person in this room was shocked to the core when you heard the news of George's passing. I was--AM. Everyone I spoke with on the phone Monday was shocked.

For the record, I'm a pastor. Regardless of my title, my life is based on my belief that Jesus sustains me daily and eternally. But I have a pet peeve about (listen) very well-intentioned, sincerely concerned followers of Jesus.

And that is when they say at times like this (trying to help), "*God's timing is perfect.*" Or, "*God must have needed him more.*"

All I know is when someone of George's impact, leaves this earth, those words do not seem appropriate.

This week has not felt like perfect timing.

When I held Suzanne Monday morning it didn't feel like perfect timing.



When someone who means as much to us as George did--well if he were here now--in this situation--seeing our grief-- I think George would say (in that half-whisper of his) something like, "Man, this sucks."

And I don't know how many times this week I have thought, "This sucks."

So to you, the family, if well intentioned, loving people have told you that this is God's perfect timing, I apologize.

When I was ranting this to myself this week I do what pastors do--in other words, after saying to myself, "this sucks," the question is how does God really feel about this?

And my mind went to Jesus when he arrived at the house of HIS BEST FRIENDS. Not "some people"--but his best friends: Martha, Mary & Lazarus--but Lazarus had died. Jesus was late. And just like this room--His dear friends were racked with grief.

Jesus didn't walk in and say, "Hey, it's ok, my Father has perfect timing." He didn't even say, "Look it's cool, I'm going to bring Lazarus back to life shortly, it's ok, really."

Here's the quote, Jesus walks into a room like this & it says, "Jesus wept."

So if you don't know God-- or are just not that into Him, maybe in part because shocking stuff like George not waking up Monday happens...I want you to know that, Jesus wept.

And now is our time to weep. And I weep with you...

(SELAH)

I have said the words "**too soon**" too many times this week as I've thought about George. And like his brother John, I have been shell-shocked, wondering if I will wake up and come back to reality.

I'm sure I believed that George would live into his 80s or beyond. And on occasion when he would allude that I'd one day do his funeral, I'd say to myself (14 years his junior), "I'm not sure I'll outlive you."

And yes, without a doubt, his death was too soon; tragic. But as I've reflected this week...I realize I've been guilty of flawed thinking.

I've assumed that healthy people like George live to ripe old ages.

I've assumed that salt-of-the-earth, selfless people like George automatically live much longer.

And ol George fooled me into thinking he was much younger:

The way his eyes would sparkle and light up...

The way he looked forward to new ideas and concepts...

The way he'd so easily flash that toothy George smile...

He was the most 40-ish 62 year old I'd ever met.

Here's the thing: George didn't believe those things.

He didn't believe he had old age coming to him.

He didn't believe that just because he treated people well and his body was still rock hard that he had old age coming to him.

He didn't talk in those terms and he didn't live that way. In fact he lived the opposite:

He interacted with us as if today were all we had.

He made decisions based on the future but he never cheated when it came to fully living today.

He knew every sunrise was a gift and he wanted himself, you and me to redeem this day before that sun came up again.

George knew that life wasn't logical.

He knew life was unpredictable.

And so he gave every day--and gave us, all that he had.

And so it sucks that he's gone.

But it's unbelievable that he left us with no regret other than:

*this is "too soon." And "we want more."*

Friends that is a ridiculously profound legacy!

A husband, a father, a brother, an uncle, a son-in-law, a friend-- is gone too soon and our only regret is that we wanted more of him.

Oh, that people should say that of US when we too, pass!!

(SELAH)

These are some passages that I think are so George. And just the way he loved trees and nature, these are about trees and human nature.

“A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit.” Matthew 7:17-18

George was a great tree.

A tree is identified by its fruit. Figs are never gathered from thorn bushes, and grapes are not picked from bramble bushes. (likewise)<sup>45</sup> A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart. Luke 6:44-46

George produced good fruit that flowed from his one-of-a-kind heart. George was larger than life because the treasury of his good heart was full of uncommon goodness.

If you are a person of faith, I offer you the truth of Philippians 4:6-7, that says in times like these if we pray, telling God what we need--that our hearts are heavy-- and thank Him for his goodness, that we will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand...which exceeds the pain of our loss. And this peace will fill our hearts and minds.

If you’re not a person of faith--maybe even because you think God allows this kind of tragedy to happen. I just want to offer that:

It is IN tragedy that Jesus weeps with us.

It is IN tragedy that Jesus offers stability in an unstable world.

It is IN tragedy that Jesus brings peace when we are unable to muster it ourselves.

Regardless of where any of us are with faith, we’re all in the same place together today.

And from here we can only do what George said often:

“We all gotta get on down that road the best we know how.”

If I can help you get on down that road, I’d love to.

Let’s pray:

Father, You have blessed us by allowing us to be part of George’s life. We are here saddened, but at the same time our minds are full of so many images of George laughing and smiling with us. We have learned so much about life from Him--He made us better. George was the embodiment, Lord, of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Lord, we thank You for this Renaissance Man that we loved so much. Help us Lord, in the wake of his larger-than-life shoes he’s left behind. Amen.

