

Funeral Memorial Eulogy

Roy Breternitz

January 13, 2012
Trinity Lutheran Church
Midland, MI

My name is James St. Louis. I, along with all of you, are here today to celebrate the life of Roy Breternitz, who is one of our closest friends, and who is the loving husband to Dianne. As a member of our "Wixom Lake" family I am here to share some reflections of Roy and to pay him the worthy tribute he as earned from his short stay with us.

No one expected tomorrow to come so soon. And as I see all of you, and after talking too many of you and sharing comfort, I now know that Roy has done a great thing. He pulled a vast number of people together of different backgrounds and areas and brought us all together. It is a testament to his values, a testament to his charm and love, and a testament to a great life. I hope what he gave you will stay with you just long enough for you to share it with someone else.

The depth of life is not only measured by how much we appreciate the important things, but also by how much we, in turn, are appreciated. And again, we find the true meaning of this idea among ourselves and our feelings. We are here because we cared. We are here because our connection with Roy was a deep connection based on friendship, love, trust, and understanding. And that can only happen with a treasured human spirit, with a spirit like Roy.

When I heard the sad news that Roy had passed away a few days ago, my first thought was that a light had just gone out in the world and in our lives. I sat in stunned silence for a very long time

thinking about the influence Roy had on my life that, until that moment, I am not sure I fully appreciated.

Since hearing the news advising of Roy's untimely passing, like many of you, my life has been greatly impacted by the continuous memories of Roy and the impact he has had on us. And it really hurts. As I thought about the "hurt" I realized that hurting was actually a good thing. Because if I did not "hurt" so much, then Roy had no impact on me or my life. Like you, I am really hurting, which says great things about Roy and who he was as a person, as a loving husband, and as a friend of all friends.

Roy was born on August 16, 1949, and was educated in the Hemlock school system having graduated in 1967. Roy served in the U.S. Army and fulfilled a tour in Viet Nam resulting in his earning a Purple Heart and being honorably discharged with the rank of Sergeant. In 1972 Roy married Dianne, the love of his life.

Just a few terms that quickly come to the forefront that truly describes the man Roy was, is that of a "loving husband, "true friend", "patriot", "caring", "there for you", "compassionate", "mentor", "hard working", "opinionated", "great sense of humor", "struggling Bago player" and a "master of Wii golf", and a person who you enjoyed being with.

There is no argument that Roy was a loving and caring husband. He absolutely adored Dianne. Having been married for almost 40 years, they loved and supported each other more each year than the one before. I had the greatest of respect for Roy, and envied how he and Dianne cared for one another without letting life's pettiness interfere. Roy had my admiration in that when he once in a while would become frustrated at Dianne when she corrected him in one of his story telling's, or in the way he played a game, or having him slow the pontoon down, it would just be

a short time later that he was hand in hand with Di giving her a hug and joking. When it came to Di, he had a fulfilled life. As my wife recently remarked to me, “I often was jealous of how Roy and Dianne loved each other.” A wonderful testament.

Roy was a true patriot. Having served in Viet Nam he sustained injuries that resulted in one his legs having to be amputated. Having endured the trauma, one could only respect the courage and bravery he continued in life involving the many days of pain he endured associated with the injury, but you would not know it because he never, ever complained. In fact he was of such a class act that the only time our Wixom Lake friends witnessed him utilizing the injury to his advantage was in a resort swimming pool during our group vacation in Mexico and he pulled his artificial leg off and raised in the air while another friend screamed “Shark, Shark” resulting in several resorters fleeing the pool. Our group had the pool to ourselves for the rest of the day.

Hardworking is a trait that surely applies to Roy. I first got to really meet and know Roy while he built his home on Wixom Lake. Their beautiful home is a wonderful testament to his skills and hard work. After a successful career with the automotive manufacturing sector, Roy retired and built his own barge and created a much needed and successful business on Wixom Lake involving the seasonal placement of boat lifts. You knew it was spring or fall when you looked out into the lake and observed the “barge man” traveling 3 miles an hour in the “Green Machine”. I actually assisted Roy a few times in the placement of lifts and have come to respect just how hard he worked, and without complaint. His hard work continued through his assisting many of us at the lake on many of our projects, and most of the time doing so without being asked. He was always there with a lending hand.

Two most precious gifts God gave us are family and friends. Roy was truly, and I mean truly a true friend. There were times I could choke him, only to have me laugh with him seconds later. There were many times I needed help and would not admit it and Roy could sense it and take care of my need without hesitation or having to be asked. I would get a brainstorm and start a project in my pole barn, and then I would hear the diesel truck coming my way, and I would panic, “Oh no. Roy is coming.” Because I knew that what I was about to hear, “What are you doing?” followed by, “Where are your plans?”, and I would tell him they were in my head, then he would stare at me with that “here we go again, this guy needs help” look. Then I would hear those words that he often shared with me, “Jim, you can’t do that.” Again, my desire to choke him. But, as many of you who witnessed my projects can attest to, Roy saved my rear. Although not admitting it to Roy, I learned so much from him. Case in point, I began to build a large Tiki Bar in my garage, when I heard the sound of a diesel truck. “Oh no.” Once again, I got the stare when Roy was told the plans were in my head, and as he reviewed my progress, I heard those neck choking words again, “Jim, you can’t do that.” He and Ivars Krauklis jumped in, and the final product became a fixture on the lake that would not have been pretty if they did not take the time to assist me as friends. And just this past summer, I was contracted to build a commercial Tiki Bar for the Casino in Mt. Pleasant. During the construction, I heard the sound of a diesel engine in the distance. “Oh No.” Same scenario, “plans in my head” and “you can’t do that” and the urge to choke. But yet again, when it was all and done, Roy pointed out some shortcoming and saved my rear. The wonderful piece of work now on display at the casino is a lasting tribute to Roy.

Friendship often times leaves long lasting fingerprints of its presence. As an example of Roy’s lasting influence of friendship in my life, I can start from the front of my home at the lake and

see Roy's presence in my boat lift that he dutifully put in and pulled out each year, and his annual assistance in helping me winterize the pontoon. I then walk by the Tiki Bar that he helped create and recall the many times we had fellowship there. I then walk through my house and observe the bathroom work he did for us, and his bulky stature standing in our kitchen, again enjoying fellowship. I then walk out the back door and observe the missing 20 foot spruce tree that he and Bruce Newvine cut down after I told him I changed my mind and didn't want it cut down. I then walk into my garage and observe the home office that he and Ivars helped me build for Cheryl, help that came after the "Where are your plans and, Jim, you can't do that" session we had. I then walk out onto the driveway and observe the tire marks from the Razor ORV Roy enjoyed hot rodding around in. I then go to my pole barn and am overwhelmed by the memories of the many days Roy, Ivars and I spent which involved assisting me, or should I say, bailing me out, in my various projects, and again more fellowship time. And then I walk back to my house and observe the Razor tire tracks in my lawn. More fingerprints.

The hours of Wii golf, the domino games, Euchre games, Baggo playing, sitting at the Tiki Bar arguing over stupid stuff, and then laughing, arriving at the summer barbecues again with the Razor driving across the lawn. The warm days playing on the water. The many vacations. Roy's fingerprints of friendship are endless.

We have a saying at the lake among our friends. "It takes the Village of Wixom to help raise our children." I will always appreciate Roy's presence and influence upon the lives of our children. I finally got used to hearing, "It's okay Jim, we will ask Roy." It's not that I couldn't fix the broken down water crafts. Okay, maybe I couldn't and and I would sneak out and call Roy for help. Even the kids knew that Roy was the "go to guy" for help, and he did so in a manner that the kids learned so much from him and they respected him. He was "Uncle Roy".

As Cheryl mentioned to me earlier, when you think of Roy's presence at the lake and in our lives, he was truly the pillar of the lake. So much revolved around him and his friendship. So much that we have taken for granted. He was just there. The "go to guy." The "friend."

And recent events indicate Roy continues to be present among us. Call it coincidence, but I like to think there is more to it than that. I would like to share a few recent examples: Dianne, accompanied by Len and Inderjit McManus had just arrived home from the hospital when the natural gas backup power generator Roy had installed at the house last year suddenly kicked on. Last week I was attempting to repair an outside electrical Christmas decoration system and dropped a very small part on my garage floor that was needed for the fixture to function properly. I searched for that part for 3 days on my hands and knees without success. A couple of days ago I walked to my work bench and quietly said, "Come on Roy, help me find that thing." And within seconds and without hesitation, for some unknown reason I pulled a piece of board away from the wall and the part was there lying on the floor. I have a stack of T-shirts on a shelf in my closet in Florida and seldom reach the ones at the bottom to wear. A couple of days ago I grabbed a shirt far down in the pile and pulled out one out that I have not seen or worn in over a year that I purchased along with Roy. The shirt had a picture of the Endeavor space shuttle launch on it, purchased after Roy, Dianne, Cheryl and I enjoyed fulfilling one of Roy's dreams of witnessing an actual launch of the space shuttle on the ocean beach near the launch site. Yesterday morning Cheryl and I left for the airport at 3:00 a.m. to fly back here. We had to travel through many miles of Florida side roads to get to the airport, and we were mostly the only vehicle on the road, and it was dark. At one point I noticed headlights behind me. We were the only two vehicles on the roadway, and for about 10 miles the vehicle followed us and I was a little anxious. We came to a widened intersection and stopped for the red light. The vehicle

pulled up alongside of us and I nervously looked over and, as God is my witness, we observed the vehicle to be pickup truck that the same model, make, color, and having the same markings as Roy's pickup truck. Cheryl and I looked at each other with utter surprise. The truck then turned off. My friend is still with us and looking after us.

A few of our Wixom Lake family friends shared with me some of their thoughts and memories of Roy. Carol Miller stated: Roy liked to mix up cocktails. Some were good, some weren't so good and several of them were brown. I sure hope it was the diet coke. And Roy would grill meat for dinner. Sometimes he would burn the steak, but we all ate it anyway. Roy and Di would arrive at pot lucks with their dish to pass and their cooler, while driving a noisy sports vehicle announcing their arrival. Roy was a hard worker and during the summer, this gave him the best tan. Boy could he get brown. He loved the lake and always knew everyone in the local restaurants which meant going out to dinner with him meant he was going to be chatting with the locals. Roy loved Dianne. In the middle of a party he would wrap himself around her and give her a smooch or rub her bun. "Get a room" came the cheers from the crowd.

Tracey and Jeremy Finney stated: I think for us, we remember a big smile and he was always laughing. I suppose that could be because he was lucky enough to live on the lake. He was a dear friend and was someone you could always count on. He would help you with anything you were working on, even if he didn't know anything about it. We shared a love for powerboats and had many discussions on just how fast we could go.

Steve and Donna Roberts stated: You could always count on Roy to be the handy man and could solve any problem large or small at our cottages. He always had a smile and a clever and witty response. Whenever you got together with Roy and Dianne, they accepted our children as their

own. The only time Roy could beat you on the golf course was when the Wii controller was in his hand. He loved his Captain and Diet with a splash of orange juice, the famous “Roy Drink”. Roy made the best popcorn ever and he was always a great partner when playing Baggo and euchre. Roy lived for “speed” and fast cars.

Bruce Newvine remembers well the time that he wanted to take down a birch tree from his front yard at the lake and his intention was to make arrangements to secure a backhoe and dig the tree out if its placement. However, Roy had a better suggestion. He wrapped one end of a chain around the tree and the other end to the rear of his pickup truck. Roy floored the pedal and the truck went into a tail spin ripping Bruce’s driveway apart and burying the rear truck tires into Bruce’s lawn while he himself was half thrown out of the truck. Roy then concluded that the backhoe idea may have been the right route to have taken.

Bruce also remembers all too well the time that he and his neighbor, Dave Miller, had expressed concern that their lawn was beginning to die for lack of water and they wanted to come up with a sprinkler system to save the grass. Roy intervened advising that he has a “system” that would meet their needs. Roy then hooked a 4 inch hose line to a recovery pump to draft water from the lake. For those of you who don’t understand the hose size, a 4 inch hose is used by firefighters to fight skyscraper fires. As Roy drafted the water from the lake to “sprinkle” the lawn, the power of the pump was so powerful that it appeared the water covered the neighbor’s houses, and watered lawns throughout the neighborhood. Roy then concluded that a regular sprinkler may be the trick.

What will I now miss that has been taken for granted: The green barge up and down the lake; Roy’s need for speed and driving the Razor; the sound of the diesel truck in the distance; Roy

calling Cheryl Barbie and Cheryl calling Roy Hulk Hogan; the Wii challenges; Friday night dinners and games; Baggo'ing; our vacations; walking out of the house and seeing Roy standing in the distance with Ivars at the pole barn; Roy's impromptu bonding with Ivars Krauklis , Bruce Newvine and myself; Roy putting in and taking out our lift; sitting at the Tiki Bar; pulling up in the pontoon; holding Diannes hand; future visits to Florida; his quick witted responses and his laughter; attending fair concerts; his popping in for a visit; his popcorn; his specialty drinks; his always just being there for us; hearing Roy being called by his nicknames, Roy-Boy, RB, Brett, Barge Man, Hulk Hogan; his physical presence, and above all I will miss his friendship.

We all hope for a final happy memory when we lose a loved one. For me I am thankful for the one I have of Roy and I. Just before Cheryl and I left for Florida this past fall there was a beautiful fall day in which Roy called me and asked if I wanted to join him on his pontoon while he checked out a location where he was to place a new hoist. I went along with him on what was supposed to be a quick trip. Once he checked his spot he continued to drive the pontoon north and I asked him where he was going. Just for a short ride was the response. Roy and I have a different opinion as to the definition of "short ride" as witnessed by the fact that we turned around at the Highwood Dam. For those of you not familiar with the ride, I got home two and a half hours later. But, the pontoon ride turned out to be one of the most pleasurable days for me last year at the lake. The day was sunny, the fall colors were brilliant, and Roy and I discussed about every topic we could think of and enjoyed each other's company very much. I was actually sad that the trip came to an end, but we had run out of beer. A couple of day's later Roy even mentioned to me what a good time he had and how pleasant it was. Cheryl and I left shortly after for Florida. Thank you Lord for the great and final memory of my time with Roy.

As a carpenter during his life on earth, St. Joseph is now honored as the “Patron Saint” of carpenters and contractors. So, I had this dream last night that St. Joseph went to God and asked, “What’s with this new guy?” And God asked if there was a problem. St. Joseph stated, “He comes up to me and wants to know where my plans are, and then says, ‘Joe, you can’t do that.’ Lord, I’m gonna choke him.” And now, we have another patron saint to turn to: “St. Roy” Patron Saint of Carpenters without Plans.

On behalf of Dianne, and Roy and all their friends, I want to emphasize our deepest appreciation to Len & Inderjit McManus, Ivars & Rita Kruaklis, Bruce & Lori Newvine; Steve & Donna Roberts; Dave & Carol Miller, and other friends of Di for rushing to Dianne’s side at the hospital offering her comfort and assistance. Ivars, Rita, Len and Inderjit, thank you so much for your continued vigil with Dianne and assisting her in the follow up process. Roy and Dianne would have done the same for any one of us.

Di, you always had and always will have a special place in our hearts. You will always be part of our lives and we will always be in yours. You will never want or need. We will all be here for you, always. We love you.

Roy, our friend, our brother. You shall never be forgotten. If we failed to have said it in the past, let me say it now. We love you guy. You will always have a stool at the Tiki Bar. May you be in the glory and peace of the Lord.

May I end with the following popular poem that Dianne has asked to be shared with all of you:

The Dash

I read of a man who stood to speak
at the funeral of his friend.
He referred to the dates on his tombstone
from beginning...to the end.

He noted that first came the date of his birth
and spoke of the following date with tears,
but he said what mattered most of all
was the dash between those years.

For that dash represents all the time
that he spent alive on earth...
and now only those who loved him
know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not, how much we own;
the cars...the house...the cash,
what matters is how we live and love
and how we spend our dash.

So think about this long and hard...
are there things you'd like to change?
For you never know how much time is left.
(You could be at "dash mid-range.")

If we could just slow down enough
to consider what's true and real,
and always try to understand
the way other people feel.

And be less quick to anger,
and show appreciation more,
and love the people in our lives
like we've never loved before.

If we treat each other with respect,
and more often wear a smile...
remembering that this special dash
might only last a little while.

So, when your eulogy is being read
with your life's actions to rehash...
would you be proud of the things they say
about how you spent your dash?