

Celebrating Hoover's Expression of Life

Sandy Wilder, February 2, 2008

Thank you so much for joining us today in this incredible celebration of Hoover's life. My Mom and family and I are so touched that each of you put everything else aside, to be here. And many of you came from across the country. We really hope you will join us at the VFW Hall for the reception afterwards. We would like to have some quality time with each of you. Tommy Kolkoski and his mates have done an amazing job decorating it with Hoover's pictures and memorabilia. Thanks so much T.

You have heard from Cis, Johnny, Dale, Mogie, and Dana. Thanks so much to each of you. I know it is not easy to speak as you have, especially when you are used to roasting the guy. So I will just add a little from my perspective as his brother. All of our talks will be available on Hoover's website.

I'm older than Hoover, and we were three years apart in school, so we were not at Bedford Junior High School or Staples at the same time. That's one reason I am loving these stories today, and what I'm reading on the website. I'm hearing much I never knew, and am so touched by the depth of your sharing, gratitude and unbroken friendships.

Recently I heard some one say: "If you want to be happy for an hour, go shopping. If you want to be happy for a day, go golfing or fishing. If you want to be happy for a week, take a vacation. If you want to be happy for a month, inherit a fortune. But if you want to be happy for life, commit to making a difference in people's lives."

I think early on, Hoover made that commitment. In fact, Mike Kashetta told my Mom that a few months after Hoover's accident back in 1974, while still in the hospital in New York City, he told Mike, "I know what I need to do with my life now, and I'm going to do it!" His style was not to broadcast it, it was through consistently being, a quiet "cheerful giver," as we heard read from the Scriptures, earlier.

You all probably remember the story of Job in the Bible, where a perfectly good guy, just living his normal life, all of a sudden has all these horrific

things happen to him. He loses his home, his health, his fortune, his family and on and on. The whole book is about how he deals with all the calamities, and how his friends keep trying to help him. But, it is all to no avail. Then, there is one amazing line in the last chapter that is the shift that changes everything. It really hits home for me. It says: "...the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends." (Job 42:10) Once Job turned his thought away from himself, everything was restored to him.

My sense is that Hoover got that intuitively. He was always there for his friends, for each of us, and because of that, he was not captive to a body that was not fully functioning.

John Mayer, the popular musician has a song where he sings: "I'm bigger than my body gives me credit for." I think that fits the Hoov. He lived in such a way that his body was not a distraction for his friendships. We obviously didn't love Hoover because of his body. It was his indomitable character. We've heard about that today from his friends, and there are so many other amazing comments on the website, celebrating his gifts.

Here's a story that may give you another insight into what made Hoover tick. Two weeks ago, when he was scheduled to have an operation to remove some blockages in his digestive system. My Mom told me that, when she got to the hospital that Saturday morning, before the surgery, she said that the first thing Hoover did when she came in was to call her right over and say, "I just want you to know that I feel like I'm the luckiest guy in the world."

He was so grateful for each of his friends, and he was especially grateful for how my Mom and our Dad took care of him for all these years: Dad for 25 and Mom for 33.

If I was traveling for work or busy with the family, I would get a call from Hoov, that was something like: "Yo Schmo! What shall we get Mom for her birthday?" He never forgot her birthday. They have such a special bond. He often called her "Honey." "Honey, can I have some tea? What about another dessert?"

A few days before my Dad's passing, eight years ago, Hoover reassured him that all would be well by saying, "Don't worry, I'll take care of Nancy."

And in his way, he has done just that! He has been an amazing companion, and has certainly helped her keep on top of her game.

A week and a half ago, when my mother and I were sitting with the surgeon after Hoover was in a coma, the surgeon said to my Mom, “I was shocked to find out that Scott had been a quadriplegic for 33 years. That is over twice the expected life span. And, overall he has been healthy most of these years. And his skin tone is absolutely amazing. I have never seen anything like it.” He then went on to say to her, “And there is one reason: the care-giving that he received from you.” Her response was: “Well, I think, that is just what mothers do.”

Later that day, Ella, one of Hoover’s nurse’s aids and good friends for the last 15 years or so was visiting Hoover. My Mom took both her hands, looked her in the eyes and told her what the surgeon said about Hoover’s longevity, and the remarkable condition of his body. Ella then grabbed my Mom’s shoulders and started jumping up and down saying: “We did it! We did it! We did it! We did it!” (Such pure, joy in their selfless giving.)

One of the things the doctor told Hoover before the surgery, is that he definitely needed to go on a very serious diet. I think that in itself may have been enough for Hoover to say, “That’s it. I am out of here!” Hoover did love his food. Especially seafood.

We have a family cottage up in Southwest Harbor Maine that we go to every summer. Hoover was usually up there for about two weeks each July. It was his only annual vacation, and he looked forward to it every year. He planned it so he had lobster every third day, and in between it was variations of steamed clams, fried clams, haddock, dried codfish, and an occasional pizza thrown in, just so he didn’t OD on the seafood.

Down here in Westport his favorite place to eat was the Red Barn. They used to do this amazing seafood buffet. I think they stopped it a year ago because Hoover almost ate them out of business. He used to have at least eight helpings, sampling pretty much everything on the buffet table, twice!

Another example of something that helped Hoover stay in touch with all of us, and transcend his body was the computer. Once he learned how to navigate it, with the amazing generosity and help of Chip Stevens and other friends, he was all over it.

He used to play backgammon with people from all around the world. Over the Christmas holidays I walked in one time when he was playing and I said, "Who are you playing?" "Some guy from Poland." He said. I watched for a couple of minutes and all of a sudden the game ended prematurely. I said, "What happened?" He responded. "The guy knew he couldn't win so he quit." It's hard to describe the competitive smirk he had on his face, but it was sort of like this: ;-)

Another thing that the computer allowed him to do was to continue playing golf. This may sound strange, but the golf games are so sophisticated now that you have to take into consideration all the things you would on a real golf course: the layout of the hole, the slope of the terrain, the wind, your club choice, your aim or direction, the back swing and follow through, your timing, and you had to have all of these perfectly aligned to get the shot right.

I said to John Cooper, the Longshore Pro and good friend of Hoover's one day in the pro shop, "Hoove is doing everything we are on the golf course except getting the physical exercise." And the dude could play. He really refined his game. He was pretty much a scratch golfer on all the top courses around the world. Such a cool thing. And he loved it.

Many of you knew Hoover as he wheel chaired around Longshore. If he went down the street and turned a corner and we couldn't see him anymore we just thought: "There goes Hoover." Just because we couldn't see him with our eyes does not mean he wasn't rolling down the road and across the fairway. We didn't question that at all. We know that he's doing his thing, in his own special way.

So, while I dearly miss seeing and talking with Hoover, when I think of him, I don't think of his experience as an ending. I think of it as a continuation. He's just turned a corner. Taken up a new residence.

Someone once said that while others will experience what they think is your death, as an ending, you will experience just a momentary transition, or moving on. You won't miss a beat. You will have no memory of "dying," because you actually won't die.

Hoove's definitely on the move. He was the presence, behind his body. He wasn't contained in it or limited by it. He never was, and he is not now. He really got this. And that's why he could give so tirelessly.

You all are sending Hoover off with the most amazing love possible. Thank you so much for that. And I guarantee that he got greeted with the same kind of love as he continued on. In watching Hoover's passing, or continuation, he reinforced to me that it is actually not death, that is inevitable. It is life. You can't escape life. Life is really the only possibility, the only option.

And living it to the fullest, by giving to others, was his message to us as long as any of us knew him. Since he never gave his body the ability to hold him back from living fully, do you think he was going let it hold him back now? There is no way. One of the doctors literally said to me when looking at his body. "He's not there."

In the hospital on the last day that he was with us physically, I felt and this amazing sense of peace that it was our time to let him go, so he could join some of his special family and friends who were waiting to welcome him with open arms. And, given the demonstrated generosity of these people they most likely handed him a new set of clubs when they greeted him. Picture the pure joy and the special smile on his face as he walked, or more likely RAN up to them.

Four family and friends that he was so very close to were: Our dad, Milo, (who we called Meatloaf), Milo's brother who we called Uncle George, and Al and Patsy Hollingsworth (Dana, Dale and Lynn's parents).

One of the last things I said to Hoover, the morning of his continuation was: "Have a blast with Meat Loaf, Uncle George, Big Al and Patsy." And what I instantly heard back from him, in my mind and heart, really sealed the deal for me: "You're darn right I will!" He said.

Thank you again for celebrating Hoover's expression of Life. And, for letting him celebrate yours.