

## ***"Rob's Remembrance"***

**Robert A. Sargent Memorial Service**  
River Road Unitarian Church, Bethesda, MD

Words spoken by Joseph A. Betz  
in remembrance on April 1, 2007

I once read that when someone who has lived a long life dies, they take with them a large portion of the past. But when someone in the middle of their life dies, they take away the future as well.<sup>1</sup> That's what I feel about this passing. It's against all the rules to beat your parents to the grave or leave your wife and young child so early. Rob was only 45 years old, and that's what makes his death so hard to accept, so difficult to grieve for, and so painful for me.

I received the call on a Monday afternoon, nearly three weeks ago. I can still hear the panic in Jennifer's voice. "Joe, you have to come home right now," she was sobbing, "Rob's dead!" How, why, and what happened; we had no answers. As I drove home from work, I realized that none of those questions really mattered. It was really about William and Miyuki, his parents Ted and Barrie, his brother and sister, and his close knit family of friends here in Maryland. It is about their feelings, their comfort, and our collective loss and sorrow.

I first met Rob seventeen years ago and there was this air of excitement when he was present. You could feel Rob walk through the house. He was on the move, like a force of nature. I sensed that he liked to test the boundaries and dimensions of his environment and relationships. He was an adventurer who loved to conquer the mountain, bike the extra mile or make the big business deal and he had his own way of drawing you into his world. There was no escape and it started with that dagger like handshake that one had to agree to.

What I most admired about Rob was his sharp wit; it was really a measure of his intellect. There was a snap to his thinking that everyone in the room sensed right away; he didn't miss a beat. He liked to kid around, pull your leg, sometimes stir the pot, but most of all he liked to engage people. He seemed to feel at home when discussing anything, and he could go from global politics and philosophy to small talk and humorous nonsense. I would usually find myself off balance when he'd ask me one of those questions to keep me on my toes. I'd typically say something like; "Could you repeat the question again," pretending not to hear, so I could have more time to think of an answer. He'd usually have a good point and it was checkmate for me anyway. Sometimes a smile without a response would do the trick and he would let me off the hook. He was equally gracious about that also. But when he did ask someone one of those questions to make us all think, I always had a sparkle in my eye and a bulge in my cheek, to acknowledge his effort. And if I didn't break out into a full laugh, Rob would look my way and say, "Come on Joe," as if a public acknowledgement was okay. I'd usually give in at that point. I'd often say to Jennifer later, "That was very funny, how come I can't get away with that?" Rob somehow could. He was so unique, so original in this respect and he was the best.

The one thing I also knew about Rob was that he loved his family. Above all, he wanted them to be happy. He loved to talk about the time he spent with William, especially the hiking and biking they did together. I think he wanted to instill in him the same joy and adventure that he found and in a broader sense, to pass something down.

Rob also had the capacity to set aside his interests in favor of his family's needs. When it came to family vacations, he used to tell me, "it's Miyuki's domain, I'll do anything to make her happy," and I know that's what he wanted. Many people may not have known this side of Rob but that's what I saw. Underneath that adventuresome façade was a truly loving and considerate person who had the same aspirations and worries, cares and feelings that we all have.

It's times like this that I really struggle with my faith the most. Some people say that this is part of God's plan. I somehow can't accept this; never do we know enough about God to say what his plan is. My own comfort lies in knowing that it wasn't God's plan that Rob should have died so early. But that when Rob died, it was God who was the first to cry.

I will miss Rob and I will never forget him. I know that deep down inside we have to look to the future. I think if Rob wanted anything, it would be for all of us to be there for William and Miyuki and not just for today, but for tomorrow and the years to come. Our collective presence in their lives will ensure that Rob's memory will continue on and our love for him will never die. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> The wording was inspired by William Sloane Coffin's eulogy for his twenty-four year old son Alex.