

Words of Remembrance – by Rachel Fields

One day Josh came downstairs from the bathroom and asked me what Carbona Ted was. “Carbona Ted?” I asked, “What are you talking about?” “There is a little jar of Carbona Ted in the bathroom,” he explained. “What is it?” Puzzled, I went upstairs to investigate. I came back down and informed him it is a face mask. A CARBONATED face mask. He was reading too much into it, thinking it was something fancy, like fra-GEE-lee in the Christmas Story. These are the little things I am going to miss the most.

Attempting to describe Josh to a person who has never met him is nearly impossible. It is like a story you “had to be there” for to truly understand and appreciate. For those of us blessed to truly know him, we can say “Well, you know Josh” and it is fully understood what you mean.

Josh was a kind, loyal and dependable person. He was quick-witted, outrageously funny and laughed so genuinely his eyes danced. He had core beliefs and values that were solidly ingrained, yet maintained a mind open to new ideas and others’ perspectives. Strangers became friends with ease for him, and good friends became family. He loved deeply and honestly.

But those are traits. Descriptors that, while very true, are rather trite and could be applied to any number of people. That is why it is so difficult to capture Josh with words, to try to describe him in any fully adequate way.

Josh, on the other hand, could REALLY tell a story. If he remembered something that had happened to him, and you hadn’t heard it yet (and sometimes even if you had), he would tell it beginning to end, jumping up to act out certain parts, arms waving, feet stomping, using all the colorful language, gestures and voices involved to really immerse you in the experience. And you did- you could fully picture it in your mind and feel the emotion involved. He was able to transport you that way, to make you feel like you had been right there with him all along.

I did learn an astounding number of things from Josh. And not just things I previously had no interest in learning (see me later for tips on how to forage for and harvest wild ginseng, forge a sword out of various odds and ends, or make a pretty decent wine out of gallons of grape juice and pounds of sugar). He could truly fix almost anything or find an ingenious alternate solution if he couldn’t. He had a voracious appetite for knowledge in general and particularly in how things worked.

But what he taught me about the most, above all other things, was grace. Josh went through a tremendous number of obstacles, and he did so with unshakable positivity, a contagious sense of humor and a strong belief that he could conquer anything that was dealt to him. I don't recall him ever complaining, really complaining, to anyone. Even in the safety of our unbreakable bond, he rarely complained to me about what he was going through. On the rare occasions when everything seemed so overwhelming his concern was for me rather than himself, and he worried about burdening me with the totality of his emotions. But he was my person and I was his and we clung to each other to stay afloat. He led with grace and 100% endurance.

Cancer was something Josh had, but it never had him. Rather than mourn the things he couldn't do, he embraced the things he could. He chose optimism and living fully. He chose hope over self-pity. In so doing, he taught me that it is indeed possible to summon a strength you never knew you had in you, to get through obstacles you shouldn't even have to imagine. Except for this. I could get through anything with Josh, but haven't a clue how to get through this without him. A cruel irony.

I wish I could tell a story like Josh could, have the words and mannerisms to convey what life with him was all about. There is no way to truly capture Josh in words or adequately describe the immensity of who he was and how much he meant to each of us. None of us know the paths in front of us but Josh provided a lesson in how to face uncertainty: with faith, compassion for ourselves and each other and with as little fear as possible.

Goodnight my darling beloved. May you rest in peace until I get there.