

A Visit Much Too Short

Today I attended the funeral of one of my cousins, Joey Robertson. So now, here I sit at the end of this long day, with my mind racing from the many emotions of the day. As I sit here trying to unwind, I am thinking back on a few memories of Joey. (Really, I don't expect many of you to read all this. I just feel a need to think a little... to write a little... and to remember...)

Joey was a "first cousin" -- my father and Joey's mother were from a family of eight children, so Joey and I shared a set of grandparents. Our family on the Mills side has always been a close-knit group, and because of this, Joey is someone I have known my entire life.

During my lifetime, as far back as I can remember anyway, Joey's family always lived either in Enterprise or Birmingham, Alabama. In his adult years, Joey lived in such far flung corners of the globe as Texas and Iowa... well, those places seemed far flung to me anyway! Even though Joey and I never lived in the same locale, he was a cousin -- and an important part of my life. To us, our cousins were like brothers (or sisters)... that's just the way it always was -- and is!

In my growing up years, as far back as I can remember, every few months, the Robertson family (Joey, his parents, and his 3 brothers) would travel up from Alabama to Papa Joe and Granny Um's house in Fayetteville, Tennessee, for a visit. It always seemed to me that their visits were much too short! Usually, on these occasions, most of Papa Joe and Granny Um's other seven kids (and their families) would also come over, and we would have a happy family reunion for a little while. The adults would sit around and tell old tales, laugh, and talk (I would give anything to listen in on those conversations now!) for hours on end! And during these visits, all of us cousins would play... and boy, did we play!

We played football, basketball, "woofle-ball" (as we called it), kickball, hide-and-peek, freeze tag, and many other games. We walked to the store to buy candy, doughnuts, soft drinks, and ice cream. We headed to the creek to wade in the water, walk on the slick rocks, build dams, hunt crawfish and snakes, and to shoot minnows, tin cans, or jars with BB guns. We built bon-fires and roasted potatoes wrapped in aluminum foil. We did all of this -- and so much more -- and Joey was right in the middle of all of it! I have so many good memories of all of us kids running and romping and playing around at my grandparent's house!

Joey was always one who would give 120% effort no matter what we were doing! He was full-speed ahead at all times! If we played a game of 2-hand touch football, Joey was the one most likely to knock you flat anyway! He was a very good athlete -- fast and strong -- and the sports competition was always cranked up a notch when Joey was around! I loved it!

As the years rolled on and both of us grew into adulthood, Joey and I did not see each other as much anymore. That is just the way life turns sometimes -- people you love grow apart because of the circumstances and paths our lives take. He went to school in Texas, lived and worked in Iowa for a while, and then lived more years in Texas and Birmingham. My time was mostly spent in the middle Tennessee area and around Huntsville, Alabama. Our paths would usually cross most years at Christmas, and maybe one other time in a year... or maybe not. Joey's family

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grew during these years, and my family as well. We each had our hands full where we lived -- so we didn't see each other that often -- but I would get dribbles of news through the years about Joey and his family and how they were doing.

When I would see Joey through the years, I always felt like we would just pick right back up where we were before. He would always ask me how my work was going... how church was going... family happenings... We might talk some sports. We might re-tell a few stories about our growing up years... about visiting with Papa Joe and Granny Um. We might talk about our kids and all the directions they were going in, and perhaps some of the challenges they faced. And then our visit would be over... usually way too soon... until the next time.

Even though Joey and I lived miles apart most of our lives, it is not difficult for me to "connect the dots" and to see and know what he was like as an adult. Jesus said you can know a tree by its fruit. Well, when I look at his six children, and I see their closeness with one another, I see a lot of Joey in them. When I see their smiles and the loving way they prop each other up during even the most difficult of days, I see a lot of Joey in them. From what I have heard and observed, these children are hard-working, honest, and honorable -- and I see a lot of Joey in them. These are traits Joey helped to instill in these children -- now these young adults. I know he was -- and is -- proud of them!

My cousin only lived 54 years on this earth. Just like his family visits in my childhood, and his occasional visits in our adulthood, his visit here was much too short in my opinion. But from these few years, Joey has left a wonderful legacy, and with me, he has left many wonderful memories that I will always treasure.

(Originally written: May 19, 2017)