

Jay and I Embarked on a Journey

Alaska Airlines, Flight 76, February 18, Friday, of this year. Jay and I embarked on a journey. We thought we were starting on the next journey of our retired life -- exploring the United States in our new camper van. The van didn't have sails, but it pointed well into the wind. The van was only 19 feet, it parked in a regular parking place, and it got good mileage. We were looking forward to camping in National Parks, visiting friends scattered around the United States, and many new adventures.

We shared the first few days of that vision. But I have to tell you, though. We were driving through East Texas, which I thought was beautiful because I think everything is beautiful and Jay thought it was East Texas. Jay said to me . . . "you know, I was thinking. We could have used the money that we spent on this van and bought a sports car and used the difference to stay in hotels. . . " Well, sorry Jay. I didn't think about that!

Our journey to West Virginia ended up taking us in a different direction than we had anticipated. We knew that Jay's life would be shortened because of his cancer diagnosis, but he were still hoping for a few good years. But you never know where your journey is going to take you.

We didn't know where our journey was going to take us when we arrived in Juneau on the Columbia on February 18, 1985, 26 years to the day. We were hoping to move to Seattle from Southern California but we overshot it a bit. It was a easy decision; the federal government would pay to move us to Juneau and if we stayed for just two years, they'd pay to move us back. We could do anything for two years! Plus, we thought we'd be closer to Seattle and it would be easier for us to get a job there, which is what we thought we wanted. I was pregnant with Jason when we arrived in town on a Monday. That very next Sunday we walked to Northern Light Church here from the Baranof Hotel, and we immediately found a home. It didn't take us long to fall in love with Juneau and we gave up any idea of moving to Seattle.

So 26 years in Juneau . . .

I asked Sarah if she had any funny stories about her dad. She hesitated and said "I have plenty of funny stories about YOU." But then she remembered the time:

We were all sharing a hotel room. Jay and I were snoring up a storm. Sarah couldn't take it any more and so she threw a pillow at us. That woke Jay up. Jay thought the alarm had gone off, so he shot up out of bed and went straight to the shower . . . it was 3 o'clock in the morning! Sarah was too scared to tell her Dad what she had done.

Another funny story; Jay thought that he should try his hand at coaching Sarah's indoor soccer team. He and Bob Schroeder were the couches. They asked the team to decide on a name. The team was mostly made up of girls and they decided on the name "The Prancing Ponies." That night, every parent of a boy on that team called Jay and told him there was no way their son was going to play on a team called the "The Prancing Ponies." So they changed the name.

I wanted to say a few words about Jay's character.

One thing he told me was that he wanted to write his own obituary. He was a great writer and he wanted to write it; he didn't trust anyone else to write it. But he didn't do it. So I had to write it. So I hope it was OK.

Jay really wanted you to feel good about yourself.

On one of our sailing adventures, the wind was too strong and we decided to head back to harbor. Suddenly our mainsail ripped out, and it flailed into the water, and wrapped around our prop. Dead in the water. A fishing boat came to our rescue and it was my job to tie a bowline knot from the fishing boat to our mast. In telling this story later, Jay said over and over what a great job I had done in tying that great bowline and keeping us safe. He never mentioned that the FIRST bowline I tied failed and it was only the second one that worked.

Jay was also a good listener.

He really wanted to hear what you had to say and he'd concentrate on hearing you say it. He would listen to you as if you were the most important person in the world. He had a way of making you feel valued and important.

Jay was honest.

Sometimes annoyingly so. I used to do desktop publishing and occasionally I would do the program for a nonprofit group and; in exchange they would give me some tickets. At tax time he asked me, "What was the value of those tickets? We need to put that down as income for our taxes." What? We need to put that down on our taxes as income. I thought that was a bit over the top.

Jay's family had a saying about marriage: "For better, for worse, but not for lunch."

But this past summer we spend four months together in Seattle doing his stem-cell transplant. We stayed in a beautiful condo overlooking the water in Belltown. We could watch the sailboats go by. Our time together was like a honeymoon -- well, a honeymoon with a lot of doctor appointments. We were totally focused on each other and we got along great. We relaxed, we read, we ate great food, we walked around the Olympic Sculpture Garden every afternoon. It was a magic time of being together without a "to-do" list. We had nothing to do but to focus on each other and we had a wonderful time. I'm so thankful that we had that time together.

Jay was very organized and very precise.

Just a few weeks before we left town --- every year he would keep track of our car expenses. So I wanted to tell you what our 2010 summary was for our Subaru. We drove 5,800 miles, and we consumed for that car 241.55 gallons of fuel, miles per gallon we got was 24.01. And he kept track of the costs of fuel, maintenance, insurance, registration. All of that came out to 29 cents per mile. He thought this was important for us to know; that the cost of driving the car was more than just paying for the gas.

So let me tell you some of the things that Jay liked:

NPR

PBS

Prairie Home Companion

He really liked not having commercial TV; not having cable

He liked the Algonquin Hotel

He liked walking the docks. Looking at the boats. He could identify sailboats the way a birdwatcher could identify birds.

He could tie a real bow tie.

He liked listening to Alice's Restaurant on Thanksgiving morning.

He liked Thanksgiving out at the Methodist camp.

He liked making a huge mess on Christmas morning with discarded wrapping paper scattered all around. Please note: this is the only time all year he would tolerate a mess.

He liked Perseverance Theatre.

He liked Juneau Symphony.

He liked the Crow Restaurant in Seattle.

He liked Northern Light United Church. He liked all the pastors and all the people. He nearly never missed church and we often attended a Methodist church when we were out of town. In fact, we attended a Methodist Church in Houston when we flew down to Houston right after we left Juneau. He served on nearly every committee, often as chair. He actually liked serving on committees--especially if he was the chair and could control the agenda.

He didn't like the glare on the stained glass window so he was glad to know we were taking care of that.

He loved walking the kids to school. He adjusted his schedule so that he didn't have to be at work until 8:30. And he kept that schedule even after the kids had left school.

He read sailing magazines. These are some of the ones I found at the house: Blue Water Sailing, Practical Sailor, Sailing, Cruising World, Sailing World, Sail, Small Boat Journal, Wooden Boat, and there was even one copy of Passage Maker. We have a basket full of his sailing magazines in the Fellowship Hall and we'd like you all to take one this afternoon!

Jay weighed the same that he weighed when he was 18 years old. Just like many of us can say.

He wore the same pair of jeans for years . . . even after his jeans caught on fire while he was wearing them down at the beach beyond Thane Road. Our favorite little picnic beach, he was building a fire and lo and behold his jeans caught on fire, he put it out and continued wearing those jeans for years.

He like watching Jason succeed as a stage manager in theatre.

He made me breakfast every weekend morning we were married. Pancakes on Saturday and oatmeal in Sunday. I'd sit on the couch reading the paper and he'd bring me my coffee and a kiss. The kids grew up thinking that mommies made dinner and daddies made breakfast.

He liked Mexican food on Friday nights. Especially Olivia's in Juneau.

One good thing about mantle cell lymphoma was making new friends. We made friends with Randy and Rusti, Wes and Peggy, Mike and Vickie, Randy and Angela, Rai and Sue.

When Jay was first diagnosed, our first thought was, "OK, we can do this. This is what we are doing now." And we did it together.

Jay loved to be out on the water. Kayaking, canoeing, chartering Nordic tug, house boat in Atlin, crewing on McKie Campbell's boat Surprise and winning the Around Admiralty Island race time and again. But mostly he enjoyed his J32 Sarah Jane. He liked sailing to Taku Harbor and Funter Bay.

He liked that there isn't a road out of Juneau.

He said that there's no bad weather only bad rain gear.

He walked to work nearly every day, no matter what the weather. Whenever he bought a new coat or a new pair of boots we joked that it was our second car.

He liked our cat Skylie, even though we had to talk him into letting us get her. The cat liked him best and always expected the morning rubdown.

He was good about keeping in touch with friends. Especially his classmates from Lycoming College and UW.

We never really know where our journeys are going to take us.

Jay and I didn't expect our journey to Juneau to last for 26 years. We didn't expect our last journey to end as it did. But our journey here in Juneau has been a blessing. Jay got to raise his children. And he got to complete his career. He got to live a good life.

Every step of the way on your journey, tell those around you that you love them. That you appreciate them. Listen to what they have to say.

And go ahead and write your own obituary if you want to. You can always add onto the end "to be continued."