

In Tribute to Ray Dorsett, A True Christian and Life-Long Friend

It seems only fitting that the honor of paying tribute to Ray Dorsett today should be one that requires some serious credentials. Surely others will have them ... but probably none like Joan Trombold who, from about the age of five, lived with her parents and siblings across the street as neighbors of Ray and his parents and brothers Bill and Allen on Harvard Drive. I can only offer “next best” credentials and tenure from when, maybe still at age five, we all entered kindergarten together at Fairmount School. But suffice it to say, Joan and I both had the privilege of knowing Ray for nearly three quarters of his truly special and interesting life. So we knew him well.

Looking back on our time starting at Fairmount School, and in particular my own time with Ray’s parents, Lois and Ed, it is clear for me to see ... and I’m blessed at age 80 that I can remember ... vivid details of many of the early childhood lessons and influences that led to Ray’s love of God and truly interesting life.

I will share a few stories to prove my case, one of the first being the formative experience of our Cub Scout den that had its origins at the Dorsett’s home. There, in addition to forming early friendships, crafting amazing Indian head dresses, and being challenged with the Dorsett’s amazing puzzle collection, while in the fourth grade we had to complete six adventures to earn the rank of “Webelos”. The adventures were basic stuff, but winning that badge was a big

deal for us all at that age. More importantly at that time, we also learned the twelve points of the Scout Law ... That a Scout is:

- Trustworthy
- Loyal
- Helpful
- Friendly
- Courteous
- Kind
- Obedient
- Cheerful
- Thrifty
- Brave
- Clean
- Reverent

All essential concepts that built upon the aspirations we were learning at home and in Sunday school, and that to this day for me have helped shaped the way I have chosen to live my life. And if there was ever a friend who strived to live up to these attributes with his friends and family it was Ray – his reverence to God and Christ surely being above all.

Ray personified all of these aspirations (and he could hit a golf ball a mile!). Everyone who knew him knew this. What most people will not have known, however, are some of the “growing up” stories that shaped his sense of humor, insatiable curiosity, love of man and nature, and love of life (all of which were influenced in innumerable ways by the wonderful examples of Lois and Ed).

So let me share with you a few of the formative and often funny childhood experiences I had with Ray. Recalling them with Ray on our annual birthday phone calls always made us laugh, and I think they may also do the same for you ...

- The Red Ant Lesson – Fairmount Park lays between where the Dorsetts and Trombold's lived and where we lived. Early on, cows still grazed there (seriously), and there were plenty of insects buzzing and other critters crawling around; but eventually the park was established and we began playing there every day, even before it was fully improved. On one hot afternoon we happened upon a mountainous red ant hill, and like any "true explorers" with the Webelos rank, we thought it would be interesting to find out what would happen if we were to stomp it down. What this brought out was an army of very angry ants that swarmed up our legs and bit us with a vengeance. We had to run like crazy, doing our best to swat away as many biting ants as we could. When we made it to my house, we had to jump into the bathtub full of very cold water (with my mom ineffectively trying her best not to laugh). On that signal day we learned the lesson of always being respectful to the red ant community.
- The Garter Snake Surprise – Also in Fairmount Park was a manhole that one day piqued our curiosity. When we popped the cast iron lid we were amazed to look down on what seemed like literally hundreds of baby garter snakes. And given my years of experience as an expert snake

handler, I managed to extract a handful of the little guys. I then urged Ray to follow me running to the nearby house of beautiful Vicki Wheeler (whose attentions both Ray and I were competing for), my thought being it would surely impress her and make her laugh if I festooned my glasses with the little snakes. Problem was, when I rang the bell Vicki didn't answer the door, her mother Gladys did. Needless to say, her shriek could be heard literally blocks away.

- The Snake with Magical Powers – Ray's mother Lois was a truly bright and loving spirit, always smiling, and always bemused by Ray, and brothers Bill and Allen. She also was pretty much fearless as evidenced one day after school when Ray and I went over to his house and found Lois out in the street sitting atop an upside-down metal washtub. She was laughing uncontrollably but managed to tell us that under the tub was a BIG red racer snake that she had managed to capture but then didn't know what to do with it. Sensing opportunity, I offered that Ray and I could take it to our 8th grade biology class the next day. Lois agreed and Ray ran to get a gunny sack from the garage for transporting it. Nasty as it was, we somehow managed to get it into the gunny sack which I then offered to take home for safekeeping overnight. My mom wanted nothing to do with it, of course, and forbid me from bringing it into the house. Mindful that it might be cold outside and the snake might die, though, I snuck the gunny sack into our utility room and hung it on the towel rack on the back of the door. The next morning I went to sneak the sack back out, and when I felt for the snake at the bottom of the sack it had magically disappeared. We never found it, of course,

which spooked us for quite a few days and nights, and neither we nor the Dorsetts ever forgot about it ... ever. Another of the many good, funny, and memorable times we shared.

As I am sure most everyone honoring Ray knows, what emerged from these and many more such experiences was a wonderment, curiosity, and desire to explore that led him to adventures in Africa and beyond ... and ultimately to the love of his life, Kulsum. Hearing him tell of these experiences was always interesting and entertaining, and always amplified by his fabulous photography and the booty he would bring to show and tell. My hope and expectation now is that Kulsum, Andrea with those beautiful baby girls, and David, Bill, and Allen will always be comforted by remembering happy tales of Ray and his exemplary time with all of us who knew and loved him.

God blessed Ray in so many ways, and in his life he was a trustworthy, loyal, and true friend always. While we mourn his loss, in the end I know we will all be comforted in the knowledge his life was truly one to be celebrated.